

**Oral History Interview of
Bobby Weaver**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
September 4, 2015
Lubbock, Texas**

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Bobby Weaver. Weaver talks about moving to Odessa and later working in the oilfield before pursuing his degree at Texas Tech. Weaver also talks about obtaining his doctorate, different jobs he worked in museums and archives, and his writing projects.

Length of Interview: 03:04:11

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David Marshall (DM):

The date is September 4, 2015. This is David Marshall interviewing Bobby Weaver at the Southwest Collection, Texas Tech, Lubbock, Texas. Let's just start by getting your full name if you don't mind.

Bobby Weaver (BW):

My name is Bobby Dearl Weaver, and the Dearl is D-e-a-r-l, which is interesting because when I filed for social security, that's the first time I ever got my birth certificate, and come to find out, I've been running under false colors. On my birth certificate—first of all, I was born November 6, 1936, in what they call a rural dispersed community. In other words, it wasn't a town, there had been a church there and a school years before.

DM:

What was it near?

BW:

Called Mount Zion, Texas, Coryell County about thirty-five to forty miles west of Waco.

DM:

Oh okay.

BW:

Down in Central Texas.

DM:

I figured you were born around Odessa somewhere.

BW:

Oh no, I'll get to that here in a minute, but my grandfather—of course I have a barn and farm house out there. We lived out in the country and he went in and filed the birth certificate. My birth certificate said, "B-o-b-b-i-e" and then "D-a-r-r-e-l-l." But my name, every legal document I've ever signed, B-o-b-b-y D-e-a-r-l. Whatever, I'd heard of people and that happening, too, and I didn't realize that social security people don't seem to care.

DM:

Okay, it hasn't caused trouble.

BW:

No, I told them. They said, "This happens all the time, don't worry about it." So I thought, Well, they're going to give me my check every month, whatever. Actually, I grew up in the oil field,

but let me to the background here, and I'll tell you how that came to be. So that was '36, and I was born a year later, had a brother that was born in '37 there. This is, you know, a very rural, small farm, Central Texas, cotton and corn and oats and that sort of thing and a little livestock. My folks farmed on shares or what we called shares, sharecropping. I'll just skip around a little bit. Anyway, when we left the farm in the fall of 1941—I believe it was September or October—I would have been five in November so I was four-years-old. My dad took a job at the state reform school in Gatesville, which was the county seat of Coryell County, so we moved to—so I grew up there in the reform school, had a house on the ground, you know, Mom was in charge of a group there, and Dad was a guard and so forth. We left the farm in '41 there. Unbeknownst to me, and I'm going to do some history stuff right now, as my old friend Jimmy Zigler (00:3:05) says, "When you're in the middle of a bar fight, you haven't got time to count the beer bottles in there." So we didn't know the larger picture of what was going on. Texas became urban in 1945. the tipped over from population—and we were part of that migration, but that did not, I mean, you know, we were looking for work, okay, Dad was. So anyway, so he went to the reform school and worked a while. He left there and went to work for a little flour mill for a few months and everything in that part of the country, and then Fort Hood was established, and Dad went to work as a fireman at Fort Hood which is just a few miles from Gatesville there. But all this time we were living in the country because you could live in a little old run down house of some kind. One of the houses I never will forget, we moved into a little community called Pancake, which is named after a family name, but everybody thinks—but anyway, a little old house there, and they evidently had been running chickens in it or something, and I can remember clear as anything, Mom and Dad taking the coffee cans and putting sulfur in them and closing up the doors and when they were setting up a fire, set it up on the bricks and set a fire in every room, and we let it fumigate the house, in other words, and we lived there for several years during the war when Dad—the government ran a bus on Highway 36, it runs from Gatesville up to Hamilton on to Comanche, and this bus that people were going to work at the fort, they'd come down the highway and they'd catch the bus, it's called the Red Ball Express. But anyway, Dad worked there until the war was over. He lost the job. I mean, they closed most of the base down, you know, and he took a job driving the gasoline delivery truck in Gatesville, and we moved to Gatesville. Now, I started to school at a little place called Jonesborough. The first and second grade were in the same room and the third and fourth grade, a little small rural community. We got to Gatesville, I was in the third grade when we moved there, and they had three whole rooms of third graders, Gatesville then was about four thousand, forty-five hundred people.

DM:
Huge.

BW:
Huge, I mean in my first twelve years of life I went to Waco one time, it was just thirty-five miles—that was a long trip. So we were typical rural farmer people and so forth. So anyway, we

moved to Gatesville, and Dad worked for the base and that shut down. He went to driving a gasoline delivery truck and then for whatever reason, that job played out. We were, in 1948, summer of '48, we were in pretty dire straits. By that time there were four of us, there were four children.

DM:

And you're the oldest?

BW:

I'm the eldest, yes. That summer of—one of my sisters was born. But I'm getting ahead of myself. The summer of '48, cousin of Dad's, second cousin—we go into that second, third, you know, typical extended family. Dad had gone out to Odessa in West Texas to work in the oil field, and he got in touch with Dad and said there was work out there. I mean, I'm not kidding you, hell we had never owned an automobile, nothing like that. So I guess you could say we were lower socioeconomic group. At any rate, Dad went out there and went to work, that was late summer of '48, and he came home at Christmas and I was twelve that Christmas or that November, and so I was twelve, and he came home for Christmas. He was going to go back right at Christmas, and so I went back to Odessa with him. One of my mother's brothers was out there rough necking and he had gotten injured and another uncle of mine was going to come out there and get all his family's belongings and bring them back to Coryell County, so I'd had a week or ten days I could stay out there with dad. So dad said he'd take me. I mean, Mom had god damn five kids, you know. So at any rate, he had come home with a cousin of his, and I rode back with them in the car. You know, you go from Gatesville to Hamilton to Comanche to Rising Star and onto Abilene. At that point you picked up, it was Highway 80 then, okay, and you go right on out. Well, I'm twelve-years-old, I hadn't ever been anywhere and seen nothing, you know. But I realized how we got to Abilene that this is a different part of the country. I mean, there wasn't a lot of trees, and it was getting dark by the time we got there. Well, by the time we got around the Sweetwater area, it was good and dark. And in those days, boom was pretty well on out in the Permian Basin around Odessa, and there was an awful lot of traffic on the highway. Well, it was a two lane damn road, and you know, you were backed up two, three, or four miles behind big old pipe trucks, and it was slow going. It was dark, good and dark by the time we got around Sweetwater, and as we got further to Big Spring and then on closer to Odessa, I kept seeing—well I thought they were Christmas trees. They were lit up—it was like a fairyland. I said, "Dad, what are these people doing with all the Christmas trees?" He likely died, he said, "No, they're not Christmas trees, they're drilling rings." But to a little kid, you know, it was like magic. And then those flares in those days, they flared off all the gas in the wells. These flares are burning, and it was a whole other world. Now, you got to remember I came out of an environment—my family came to that Central Texas area in 1870. My great-great-great-grandfather was a Methodist, one of those circuit riders, and the founded at Mount Zion, they founded a little old Methodist—and that's why Mount Zion was there. So my family come in, and I always hung out

in the Baptist, Methodist church, you know, I didn't know any better, but anyway, so we got into Odessa, and we came in on Second Street, that was Highway 80. I mean, it was just neon everywhere and people. It's like ten o'clock at night, and people are just roaming around on the streets, and there's all these liquor store signs and the old dance land, a big old dance hall was right there at the corner of Second and Dixie right there on the east side of town. I mean, I thought I'd gone to Sodom and Gomorrah. It was just so foreign, and I remember we turned there at Second and Dixie and went—Dad was staying in a rooming house about four or five blocks around Sixth and Dixie, I mean a couple of blocks off of four or five blocks off Second Street there, so I went in there, and he had to go to work the next day. By the way, he was a tank builder. He was building bolted steel tanks.

DM:

Was he riveting those tanks?

BW:

No, no, these are bolted. I won't explain about tank building in detail, but tank building is bolted tanks. You get your ass whipped—those are the guys that are welders and shit, they don't know what they're talking about, and most of them built field tanks. The 500 barrel, 1,000 barrel tanks that were right at the well when the well's drilled. They're the ones that initially held the oil and then it went from them up to the larger tank farms and so forth. But anyway, I got up the next morning, hell, it must have been five o'clock, Dad got up and we went down to the corner of Second and Dixie down there, and there was a little old place called the Trolley Inn. It was a little old diner, but the hands all called it Cockroach Inn. And it was, I mean, it was just full of guys. They're all having breakfast and fixing to go to work in the oil field. That's the first time I ever smelled crude oil. I love that lifestyle, but you smell that oil, they had it on their boots and things. In those days, usually guys got their lunches at the café. They'd go eat breakfast and they'd either make a lunch or a short lunch. A lunch had a couple of sandwiches and a piece of fruit and maybe a piece of pie or something, and a short lunch just had one sandwich. That was the difference, so anyway, they are getting—it was in a sack, and they were having breakfast, getting their lunch and fixing to go out on the job whatever that might be. So anyway, that was my introduction to the oil field is it was just a whole other life. My Dad's cousin also worked over for the National Tank Company. They were there on Dixie about Sixth or Seventh and Dixie, I don't know remember now, they had a yard there. The next morning we finished breakfast, Dad took me over there and they put me in a crew car and took me over to his cousin, the one we'd ridden out there with, to his house. It's seven or eight blocks from there. So I stayed with his wife and children while Dad and him went out and worked. We were there—I was there, I guess, probably a week. I don't remember the exact time. My uncle from Central Texas arrived, and we loaded up my other uncle's materials. I helped them load a trailer and we hauled that stuff back. Now, this uncle that got hurt, he was rough necking, and people from Coryell County, a lot of people were out there. They had all left that country, they were looking for work. Some

of them found jobs and they'd call—as a matter of fact, a few years later, they had a reunion that was over a 150 people showed up out there in Odessa, of people from that area. So that gives you—there was a heavy migration from the Central Texas farming community out to the oil field looking for work. Anyway, back to my uncle that got hurt. It was the winter time—the winter of '48, '49 was a really, really bad winter. It was icy and really got cold, even went down there, in down home down around Gatesville, it iced up and got bad. My uncle's working on a rig and for whatever reason he was a boll weevil—you know what a—a boll weevil is a newcomer to the oilfield, that was the term. So Uncle Bud was pretty much a boll weevil, and he went out to do something about the mud pumps. Long story short, he blocked in on a three thousand pound pressure line and the valve blew out and he was right up against it, it hit him in the chest, blew him up against the pipe rack, and he was in the hospital in Abilene.

DM:

What did it do to him? Rupture something or break some ribs?

BW:

Well I was going to come to that.

DM:

Go ahead, yeah.

BW:

So we loaded stuff up and we headed back so we stopped at Abilene hospital to see Uncle Bud. I was a man grown before I knew his real name is Johnny Wells. You know, I'm sure you've done the same thing. Everybody—but his real name is Johnny. But anyway, Uncle Bud, and he was in a cast from his neck down to his knees. I mean, it broke damn nearly every bone in his body. Needless to say, he never did go back to the oil patch. He went back home and went to farming and whatnot. I guess saying that, it's a dangerous place for work. At any rate, Dad stayed out there, and I was in the sixth grade. When school was out in May, well he had finally found a house there in Odessa. So we loaded up. I'd like to say there were five children, one of them less than a year old, Helen, she had just been born. There's a fellow named Gilmore there, a livestock hauler. We loaded all our possessions in one of these livestock trucks and Mr. Gilmore moved us to West Texas. Now me and Sam, that's my brother just younger than me, I was twelve, he was eleven. We rode with Mr. Gilmore in the truck, and then we were going to get the stuff out there, and a couple days later Mom was going to bring the other three, the three little ones by bus out to Odessa. We went, and instead of going the Highway 36 route to Abilene, we went Highway 84 to San Angelo and then up Sterling City, Garden City, Midland, that way. We stopped, and the reason Gilmore did that, we found out, he had worked out there on a ranch out just west around Sanatorium, just west of San Angelo out there, it was a TB sanatorium back in those days, the

town's still called that I think, there's a community there. But anyway, and the name of the town was a little place called Brome, B-r-o-m-e. You know where that is?

DM:

I think so.

BW:

Anyway, there was a ranch there, and he stopped because he wanted to visit with these people. That's the reason he went. Sam and I both, we were all excited. We had been down to the old rich theater forever down on the square there and seeing cowboy movies, and we were going to see some real—there's just a damn house and a few barns with a bunch of old cows and a horse or two out there, and people had overalls and blue work shirts just like at home. Anyway, it was a big disappointment. We expected people with guns, but anyway. So anyway, we moved out to Odessa. That would have been in June, early June or late May, I don't remember exactly, of 1949, and we arrived in Odessa. At that point in time, 1950, I think, I could be wrong. I've written this up before. Anyway, I'm pretty sure Odessa's 30,000 people. It really boomed, and the only paved streets in town were downtown. The older part of town was paved, and everything and Eighth Street, which is the main drag going out in Second Street which was Highway 80, it was paved. Andrew's Highway and the highway that went straight through town to Crane, it was paved, but none of the residential areas were paved except in the immediate downtown area down there.

DM:

Was that 385 at that time? That north, south highway, was that 385?

BW:

Yeah, the one that goes from Crane from down there to Castle Gap and on up to [inaudible] [00:19:24] too, but that's—we don't want to go there. Yeah, and so and on to Kermit, when you get on the north side of Odessa, the road splits and one highway goes to Kermit and the other goes to Andrews, and the Andrews one comes on up to Lubbock. And so it struck me as really strange because down home, nearly all streets are paved—of course it's a small town, but I didn't realize what a boomtown was, and I was in one, as I say about the beer bottle thing, when it's happening to you and you look back in retrospect, you recognize a lot of things.

DM:

That's really neat though that you got an experience of a boomtown.

BW:

Yeah, and I've discovered since then that when the boom hit there approximately in 1930, there's only 400 people there. During World War II, it grew up quite a bit, and then that

immediate post-war period, you know, there wasn't enough schools, the town just totally exploded. I got to know a lot of town because like I say, I was twelve, but we didn't have a car or anything. I don't think we had a bank account for years because Momma would give me—I was the oldest, so she would give me the money, and I'd take the money and I'd walk downtown and I'd pay the electric bill, and you know, she had the bill and I'd go down, and she's depending on me. So I got to go all over town and see, and from where we lived, we lived at Sixteenth and Hancock which is about three or four blocks east of that highway going to Andrews. And I would walk, and that would be Grant Street when it was in town, but I'd get on Grant, and so from Sixteenth down to Second Street, which is Highway 80, so what's that? Fourteen, fifteen blocks? So I'd walk that distance and everything, and man, there were little ole beer joints everywhere, you know, and guys running around wearing hardhats. It was exotic. Pools halls—

DM:

What about brothels? Were there brothels?

BW:

I never knew any cat houses as such. There were a lot of girls working out of the joints.

DM:

Out of beer joints.

BW:

Out of beer joints, now where Grant Street was, the main north/south highway and then Eighth Street, Eighth Street and Second Street merged about a mile out of town. They joined one another, they were kind of at an angle, and so if you were coming from the east from Midland, you could take off on Eighth Street, and it would be a main drag just like Highway 80 was. Okay now, with that said, when you got about two blocks off of Grant, which is the main north, south end, and you're going east on Eighth, there were probably eight or ten beer joints. I mean, there was a Nip and Sip, The High Hat, The Tivoli—those are the ones I remember. The Nip and Sip, they didn't even have locks on the door. I mean, some of these were open twenty-four hours a day, and I mean it was bad news in boys town. It was a really tough area, and to the best of my recollection, we moved there in '49, so about '51 '52, the city pretty much shut all them down. They moved out on the Andrews Highway, on the north edge, and they're still out there.

DM:

Outside the city limits.

BW:

They're just out on the outer—and there's a big dance hall called the Stardust on the right hand side going north. Across the street was the Pelican Club. Now, the guy that owned the Nip and

Sip opened the Pelican over there. There's always your obligatory Do Drop In and a couple of big dance halls because I spent many a happy hour in Stardust, and Willy Nelson used to play there. That's where he grew a beard and everything. And so, you know—

DM:

What about some of the guys from that area? Let's see, Roy Orbison in Kermit, Waylon Jennings—

BW:

Let's see, Roy and Larry Gatlin, I know Larry pretty well. I've met Roy, but when I was in high school—now Roy's from Wink. Okay, he had a band called the Wink Westerners, and I'll tell you a story about Roy Orbison. He had a band called the Wink Westerners, and they played all that country in there. I was in high school, so I managed one way or another, go to some of those places. He would come out there, and at Seventeenth and Grant and a little bit west of the highway there, there was a barbecue joint called Frady's. It was kind of a combination beer joint, barbecue joint. And Roy and Buddy Holly used to meet there. Buddy would be playing down, and they would meet out there. What was her name? Claudette Frady was the daughter, she was about my age, and Roy was about my age, right in that general area. Long story short, you've heard the song "Claudette"? Okay, they got married. He married Claudette Frady, and she's the one that got killed in the motorcycle accident years later. But Roy, Roy's the ugliest mother—he wore those big old coke bottle glasses, but the man could sing, "Ooby Dooby" was their theme song. He got several of those guys from Odessa and, you know, they formed the Wink Westerners.

DM:

Was it a rock and roll band or—?

BW:

No, it was country western. You couldn't do rock and roll in those beer joints in those days.

DM:

Yeah, I was about to say, that's all I know of him is the rock and roll.

BW:

Yeah, well you know—and they decided to go to college, and so they went to North Texas. I think they lasted a half a semester up there, the whole band. So they went up to Denton, and that's when they wrote "Ooby Dooby," which was kind of their theme song there. They were older than Larry Gatlin and them. There was an outfit called the Hub Jamboree. It was on Sunday afternoon, I believe, is a hub clothing store.

DM:

In Odessa?

BW:

In Odessa, yeah, and Roy and them, they played there. Then the Gatlin kids, you know, it was Larry and it was two brothers and then their sister who was, I want to say Darla, I can't remember. But they grew up in kind of a holiness time. I don't remember—a church, and they learned to sing in church is what they did.

DM:

So it was gospel at first and then—

BW:

Well, and then their mother, she was real strong on promoting them, and as I remember it, they lived around Abilene a long time and then they moved to Odessa during the fifties and things and that they were also in the Hub Jamboree, that's what I'm coming to. They were on the Hub Jamboree there in Odessa, and that's kind of where they got—the sister, she dropped out and got married, I believe, and they kind of disbanded, and Larry went out to Nashville, and that's when—well, Larry was quarterback for the Permian Panthers.

DM:

Oh was he?

BW:

Yeah. And he went on scholarship to the University of Houston playing football.

DM:

Really?

BW:

Yeah, last time—I worked for the Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City. Larry came down to do a deal for us and everything. Me and him sitting back stage, ate barbeque, and we reminisced a lot. He's typical West Texas. What you see is pretty much what you get, and he's full of it. So anyway, I didn't know him all that well. And there was another guy named Larry Henley. Larry Henley wrote "Wing Beneath My Wings," if you're familiar. And Larry, I knew Larry really well. As a matter of fact, he died last year I understand. He was at a high school reunion a few years ago and they formed a little band and his first song was "Bread and Butter," or something, I forget now. Anyway, it was kind of a _____ [00:28:42], and then he wrote "Wind Beneath My Wings." Everybody did it, and he made a lot of money, and he moved to Nashville.

DM:

Now what about Buddy Holly? You said he would come down there. Did he perform down there?

BW:

I beg your pardon?

DM:

Did he perform down there?

BW:

Evidently he did, I never went to any of his shows. Like I said, I met him, I think one time, and he's almost exactly my age because birthday is right about now, I believe, he would have been seventy—I'll be seventy-nine in November, so he's right in that time. No, like I say, I met him once, and that was the extent. Now some friends of mine, B. B., Billy Bailey, Billy had a little old country western band, and I knew him real well, and nothing ever came of it, but the guy over at Clovis that had the studio, Petty. Petty hired B. B. and his guys to be his studio band over at Clovis. So they moved over at Clovis, and oh B. B. married a good looking little old gal there that we went to high school with. I talked to her years later, they didn't last long, they got a divorce. And she was cooking for all that [laughs, inaudible] [00:30:04] there in Clovis, and they were doing backups. Petty, of course, he did a bunch of performers, and they were the, what would you call them, house band or whatever they were, and they did the backup for an awful lot of the vocal type things. I was trying things—they were any number of—the thing about it, there were so many beer joints and everything that a lot of those particular country and western performers, you know, came there, and some of them never really amounted—there was a guy by the name of—I'm trying to think, Joe Speck and I had a long talk about him. I can't remember this fellow's name, but he wrote a song, an oil field song called "This old House." Anyway, he did one on a rig about the old rig coming apart and whatever. "It ain't going to live no longer," or whatever, but there were a lot of fellows that—and several of them went to Nashville and wrote music.

DM:

What kind of people were flocking into Odessa? I mean, performers were coming there because of the bars and this kind of thing. Were these people mostly from Texas and the Southwest, or did you pick up that they were from other areas?

BW:

Okay, the makeup of the community, I would say the bulk of them were from—there were basically two crowds. You got some professional oil field hand experience and then you got those coming in because they needed so much help. The bulk of the people were from Texas and

the Southwest. Although, I met any number from—there's an area around Salem, Illinois, which is east of Saint Louis out in there. Evidently, there's an oil field there and a lot of those guys came out of there, some out of Arkansas around Smackover and an East Texas bunch out of—the East Texas boom hit in the thirties and a bunch of those fellows came out of the oil field there and moved out to West Texas. I know my ex-father-in-law, he grew up in the Fort Worth/Dallas area and his brother, oh J. B. Haywire Brown, J. B. Old J.B had gone to the oil field in the twenties. And he was an old brother of my father-in-law, and he drilled and roughnecked and then my father-in-law came and he was a driller and whatnot. When I married his daughter, he was a _____ man [00:33:01] for Shaffer Tool Works there in Odessa, and he was kind of typical, he came as a roughneck, later became a driller, and he had a real mechanical aptitude, and so he did very well, you know, working, I mean, for a working man and everything.

DM:

But you knew of some people from around the Kilgore area, that East Texas oil field area?

BW:

Oh yeah, yeah.

DM:

How about Ranger?

BW:

Okay, the thing about Ranger is Ranger didn't last long. Ranger's about a three or four year boom. You know, Desdemona Hog Town? Eighteen months and everybody talks about it, but your average boom, a boom that lasted more than two years was unusual.

DM:

How long did this Odessa one last that you got into?

BW:

Dad came there in '49 and then in '50 or '51, that's when Schneider hit. Now Schneider was the last big boom in West Texas, and Schneider went on from like '50 to about '52. All the guys out of Odessa—let me talk—let me back up a minute and do a history on boomtowns and explain how this works. It all had to do with transportation, now that's the key. So if you go back to the first boom in 1901 down there at Beaumont, you know Spindle Top, what you've got to remember, the only way you'd get anywhere was by train. The old roads are terrible and everything was pretty much by car as you're coming on, but whatever. And so what happened was that when you discovered oil, if you're going to work, you either had to ride horseback or walk to the location, to the job. So consequently, anywhere a little ole oil boom developed, and an oilfield usually is not very big; six, eight, ten miles squared or something like that. And so a

little old town would grow up right there, and that's where all the shack towns, the tent town things—and there were just hundreds of them, and maybe thousands even. And so that's how the boomtowns got started. Now what happened was, many times there would be a large town in the area like Beaumont down there in southeast Texas, it's a good example. It was already established. Consequently, they had an end place, law enforcement infrastructure. And so although there's a lot of lawlessness and overcrowding and just almost destroyed the infrastructure of the town, in other words, you couldn't—but they were much more stable. Whereas these little bitty places, all these thugs come in, they'd build beer joints and everything and it was every dog for himself, you know, kind of, and hundreds of these things developed over time. Okay, we're going to fast forward. Let me get up around World War II. Excuse me, one, World War I. About 1920 is when trucks and things come and enter the scene at which time you start paving roads and everything. Well, at that point in time then, you could establish towns. Boomtowns would be further apart, so you had enough transportation, in other words, you had to get out to the job. I mean, is this making sense?

DM:

Yes.

BW:

Now, by 1950 when Snyder hit, Highway 80 was paved out there. Odessa had become—Odessa and Midland were always great rivals, okay. Odessa is a working man's town, Midland's the company town. The headquarters for all the oil companies are there and all the contractors, and that's a general statement, that's not a hundred percent. Now that I kind of established the way the boom—okay, so Snyder hit. It's eighty-nine miles from Odessa to Snyder. The best way to go was to go to Big Spring and turn north. You could cut across, but you didn't want to. Rule of thumb when we were building tanks, or most contractors and roughnecks and everything, 100 miles or less you drove back and forth, and if we were building tanks, and it was more than 100 miles, normally we'd stay out of town because transportation is better, the roads are better, and that tended to make the population coalesce into these larger urban areas. Does this make sense? And that's what happened with Snyder. Snyder went from like 2,000 to 20,000 in six months. They didn't know sic them from come here meant. I went over there to Snyder, I went over there a number of times, I wasn't working the patch with Dad and everything. Guys are sleeping in the supply house floors, and he was working for National. National rented two rooms and a motel for a year, so their crews could go over there. And they would go on a job. Normally, if you build a tank and the steel comes in sections, five-by-eight foot side sheets and pie shaped, you know, bottom decks, and they're punched on two-inched centered holes and whatever.

DM:

Ready for bolting.

BW:

Ready to get bolted up. So what they would do, a truck would go out and they would unload steel on location, a pad and everything. And then the crew would come and they would build a tank. Two 500-barrel tanks is about a two day job for a four man crew, roughly. When I was building tanks—and I'll get into more detail. We'd go on a job here and maybe we would drive down south of town sixty miles. We'd go down, start the job, come back home, then the next day go down and finish it. The next day me might be sixty miles west of town, and it might be ten miles out of town, wherever. It's a very addictive line of work for a young person because you're going all the time and you're seeing all of it and you're making good money. It pays well, a lot better than working a grocery store. Snyder was the last boom, and it marked an evolutionary process in working in the oilfield because Snyder was not a shack town; Snyder was a giant trailer park. Trailer parks, mobile homes now they call them, but trailer houses—right after World War II, trailer houses became such that families could—so a guy that worked in the oil field could follow a boom, take his family with him. So it attracted to a more stable working population. It gave them a place to stay, and then when it was over, you could leave and you weren't left with a bunch of shacks and rundown places and everything. Not to say Snyder didn't have some of these, but by and large, it was just thousands and thousands of trailers in Snyder.

DM:

So some mobile home companies were making a killing.

BW:

Oh, they were making a killing. Okay now, in those days, at first you were restricted to eight-foot wide trailers. I forget now about the links, but then they changed the law and you could transport a wider trailer on the highways. To give you an example, I have the numbers in my files, but I'm not sure, but Odessa, when I lived there in the 1950s, Odessa I said was about 30,000—about 10,000 people lived in trailers, and they had trailer parks all over town.

DM:

What about the tent—did you see that in the forties?

BW:

No, I saw two tents that I know of.

DM:

You're talking about the frames and the wood frames.

BW:

Yeah, and these are half wall tents with the boards up about hip high and then canvas. There was one part of town over there, and evidently it as a holdover from just a pre -World War II thing,

and that was only tents I ever saw at Odessa. I delivered circulars, that's the only way a little kid could make some money, and I went all over town. I never, that I remember, no shotgun houses, you know, shotgun houses were a big deal in those boom towns because they could pre-cut all the lumber and just throw those things together, and it's two rooms usually and that sort of thing. Well hardly any of that, because the boom really hit, I mean, it hit in Odessa in the thirties and everything, but World War II on was when Odessa really exploded. And so consequently, they had the advantage of the trailer houses and everything. The trailer houses made all the difference. Nowadays, that has morphed into even a greater thing in which they build what they call these man camps. We're talking about 1990s, 2010, you know. Man camps are nothing more than portable homes. They go out, and they build a—they put in forty or fifty of these portable homes, and the companies sometimes would rent half the camp, and they bring their employees in, and they stay there, I mean they got a dining hall, they've got whatever.

DM:

What are these portable homes like?

BW:

The ones now?

DM:

Yeah.

BW:

They're like a motel room.

DM:

So they're not a mobile thing.

BW:

No, they're not.

DM:

You can take them apart and reassemble them.

BW:

They can haul them on an eighteen-wheeler. They're that kind of construction.

DM:

What kind of dimensions are you talking about?

BW:

They're probably eight-by-ten indoor rooms, similar to a motel room. But it's just a place to sleep, and they've got a laundry there, they've got a mess hall. Usually a company will pay for it, and a company will pay, and so the employee—I talked to some fellows there in Odessa. They were from Fort Worth, and they would come down and stay in a man camp out there by Stanton, this was like two years ago or three years ago. They would stay out there, and they'd stay, oh I think they stayed three weeks, then take a week and they'd go back to Fort Worth. It's essentially just a place to sleep and eat. Then they'd be out on the job doing—nowadays, I'm not familiar with all the—but it's a lot of electronic technology, a lot of—there were guys doing well inspection type things and then down hole controls, particularly if you're doing that slick water fracking and stuff because we used to whip off. In my day, you used a whip stock. A whip stock is a device that will divert your drill bit off X number of degrees. Well now they can go ninety degrees. Now, they don't go down and just turn, it's a slant, but they need a GPS type electronic stuff to guide, and they have it built in, amazing. It's just like magic, but anyway. Boy, I've diverged a lot.

DM:

That's all right, it's good stuff. But the housing is interesting. What did y'all move into when you moved out there?

BW:

There was a little house at the corner of 1522 North Hancock, the corner of Sixteenth and Hancock in Odessa. It's kind of the northwest part of town. In those days, the dimensions of Odessa, Odessa ended at Twenty-Seventh Street, which is now they changed the name to University I think. That's on the north. On the east is East County Road which they changed the name to Dixie now. The west is West County Road, really original. On the south side, the south side was where your Hispanic black community and so forth, kind of the southeast part of town, they had their own school called Blackshear when we moved there in '49. There was one—I didn't even know hardly know about Blackshear in those days.

DM:

Is it B-l-a-c-k-s-h-e-a-r?

BW:

It's B-l-a-c-k-s-h-e-a-r.

DM:

Yeah, okay.

BW:

I've been trying to research it recently, and there's not any information.

DM:

What had brought them in?

BW:

They were the porters in the stores.

DM:

They came in as part of the boom, though, the service.

BW:

That is correct. There never was a heavy black population in West Texas. I mean, there was no—

DM:

Some came in for the cotton harvest and that kind of thing.

BW:

Well see, there wasn't any farms in Ector County, there are no farms there, period. Okay, it's ranching country and very sparsely populated. As a matter of fact, Crane County or Winkler County which is where Kermit is, when the boom hit there in 1928, there were eighty-two people in the county, Kermit and Wink, they are the two main towns and everything. Crane County wasn't even established till '26. It was an adjunct to Ector County which is Odessa. Odessa only had 500 people. In Crane County, there were twenty-eight people. What's his name? I've gone totally blank, and I know him well. He's dead now, wrote all the western novels. He wrote *Sand Hill Boy*.

DM:

Elmer Kelton.

BW:

Elmer, okay, Elmer who wrote *Sand Hill*, he talks about a lot of that. He was raised down in that county. In *Sand Hil*—is it *Sand Hill Boy* or *Sand Hill Kid* or something, anyway, that was the little book he wrote, and it's his reminiscence of what life was like. So when crane was established in '26, I don't remember now, but there's like forty people in the whole damn county, and then the town of Crane was built which brings up a whole other housing thing, which I will get—what was I talking about? We were talking about housing.

DM:

Well, we'd gotten off into why did this minority—

BW:

Oh okay, yeah, why did the minority—first of all, I worked roughly twenty years in the oilfield, roughly. I worked about fifteen all the time, and then going to college, I'd go back, if I needed money I could go home on weekends. I could make \$150 a day. They didn't know that around Texas Tech. The money Tech was paying me to teach classes was just beer money, but they didn't know that. Minorities, there were, period, no black people in the oil patch. There weren't any, none. Hispanics, I knew one guy, and I met him over at Kermit working for a guy named Mickey Izel. There were no minorities working in the oilfield.

DM:

So they were in there working in stores.

BW:

They were working in stores, yeah. You know, janitors, various kinds of things. Shoe shining boys, they always called them boys, whatever, kind of the support type things of that nature. Now with that said, I've run an informal survey recently and right now, about 98 percent of all the roustabout crews are Hispanic. And about 25 or 30 percent of all the drilling crews are Hispanic. Now that influx took place beginning about 1980. Prior to that, there were hardly any Hispanic people working in the oilfield in West Texas. I mean, I've witnessed that.

DM:

That's an interesting transition.

BW:

Yes, it is, and it pretty well corresponds with the influx of Hispanic people from the valley and so forth. They come in as agricultural workers and set up places like Hereford or you know, around Lubbock here, but they work picking cotton or agricultural, and then they branch out a little bit into other things. Once a guy, you know, gets a rough necking job, it's kind of like my dad—it's the same exact principle. The people I knew in Central Texas came out here and found a job, they'd send back kinfolk, friends, Hispanic guys. The process is exactly the same.

DM:

Yeah. Makes sense.

BW:

Okay, is that—and that's one of the things that's fascinating. In fact, there's a young lady at William and Mary doing a dissertation now. I sent her a thousand pages of oral history

interviews last week, and she's studying that particular aspect of the Permian Basin. It's a fascinating thing. One of the things y'all are missing, you really need to get down there and interview a lot of the Hispanic oilfield workers because they're the first generation oilfield workers in West Texas. It would be a good project, a good Spanish speaking individual, and how you could get into that would be—well, you know, you could do like me, I told you I did an informal survey, I just called every roustabout outfit I could find in that phonebook and talked to them and said, "How many guys do y'all work?" and so forth. And then get them talking on the phone and they'll kind of give you the rundown, you see. It's an ad hoc oral history, I guess. By the same token, it gives you a trend, and it's very interesting. I know even the school system people would be a good because they can tell you the Hispanic population in the schools because I understand there's about 50 percent plus in Odessa now in terms of Hispanic in the public schools. But it's a trend, and it's nothing in the world, but an economic necessity. To me, it's not a big badass sociological thing, talking in overblown terms of equality and all that. It's a question mainly it's a job, you're going to go where the work is. But I'm a simple minded soul. I don't—

DM:

I agree with that; I agree with that. That makes sense.

BW:

But okay, that says something about now, okay, there is only one high school in Odessa, it's Odessa High School.

DM:

Is that the case now?

BW:

No, I'm going to discuss that in just a moment. I graduated from high school in 1955. The following year, they built—okay, the Brown vs. Board had come through in '53, I believe, you know, whatever. I'm supposed to know those kinds of things. Dr. Barr would kill me if I—but I graduated in '55. The following year they built a high school called Ector High School on the south side of town and then Blackshear was done away, and it was mostly Hispanic and black. Kind of the southeast quadrant of town is black and Hispanic, southwest was gringos, Anglo, okay. I come out of the environment. So Ector was built. It has evolved into something else. I don't remember now, but then a couple or three years after that, they built Permian. Now, my sisters all went to Permian, me and my two brothers, we went to Odessa High School. I hadn't won a football bet since then. That first year we beat the hell out of them, and after that it's been down, Permian. They're serious about their football down there.

DM:

Yes, they are.

BW:

But anyway, so that tells you something. And then I started the seventh grade in the fall of 1949, and it was Crockett Junior High. So I went seventh grade. The following year when I entered the eighth grade, they built the second junior high which was Bowie, Crocket, Bowie, if you can imagine. But they didn't get it complete by school time so we went half days. The people that lived part town that were going to go to Bowie, they went afternoons and we went in the mornings. It took a month or so and they finished the school and so they became, you know, the Bowie Bubs, we became the Crockett Crunks. Anyway, the town was exploding and elementary schools were being built all over the place, and it was typical of local facilities being overwhelmed—the school system, the water.

DM:

Was the crime very high? Not enough law enforcement?

BW:

We beat Houston out for the number one murder capital of the nation per capita there in 1952, I think it was, or '53. You know, well once again I know there was a place called the Texas Café down on Second Street. There was guy plugged two guys right in front of that. They never did catch him, I don't think on one night. But those were—in those days, there wasn't a lot of drugs and everything, it was just stealing and meanness, and you could go out in any of those joints and get your head skinned if you're inclined. That wasn't hard to do at all. It was—the town was bursting at the seams, and looking back on it, you know, I went to the oilfield at a time of great change because what happened was, during World War II, they were just changing over from steam rigs to diesel type operating rigs and going from various kinds of technological change when World War II broke out. Well, everything froze because all the steel and everything had to go to the war effort. Okay, by the time World War II ended, pretty much all the drilling rigs were junk. They spell the demise of two or three occupations, and I'll tell you why. About the time I started in the patch, the newest thing was what we call a jack knife rig. That's the type of drilling rigs they use today. The jack knife rig is—a rig is composed of three elements—people are not aware of it. One is the derrick, the other is the power supply and the third is the drilling equipment. Okay, the way it had worked in the past, they'd build wooden derricks, and they'd nail the old derricks up and whatever and they moved equipment in, and they did the thing and then they got through. They tore the thing down and built another one sometime. They'd reuse the lumber sometime—they'd leave it there for a pulling platform to pull casing and rods and things. Well, about 1930 they changed over to steel. They built the rigs the same way. They came in sections, and you took angle iron basically, and you built your derricks and then you moved your equipment in, and then you tore it down. Rig building was a big occupation, it was important. Come World War II, they had jack knives on the drawing board prior to that, but they couldn't build them. In the 1950s they started building them big time and essentially what happens with a jack knife is that those components, the derrick, the drilling equipment, and the

power equipment are three separate components. Now, let's play like you've got the rig up and running, you finished the well and you're going to move it. What you do is you pull a couple of pins out of two of the legs on that derrick, and you lay it over, you put it on the truck, you haul it off somewhere, then you pick up the platform, the drilling platform with all the equipment, you haul it off, power supply, and you haul it off, and then you reassemble it. It's not necessary to tear it down and build it up. You need a bunch of truck drivers, you know, a crane operator, nowadays a crane—and so that killed the trade of rig building. Those were the kinds of innovations that were coming in about the time I went to the oilfield, and in terms of tank builders, tank builders forever—first they were wooden tanks and I worked at wood crew for a little while. That ain't very fun.

DM:

What are you dealing with? Large slats?

BW:

The side elements on a tank are called staves, and in a wood one, they are slightly angled. Say they are six inches, and they're about four inches thick or so, and they're slightly angled on the inside so you get a bevel to make it round. What you do is you commence standing those things up and you tack them together at the top with a rope or something, you know until you get them all—once you get them all up, then you put a steel band. First of all, you lay your bottom in the bottom part, so you've got your diameter organized. And then you put one steel band around it, and that holds it nice and tight. Then you start putting the other bands at about one foot intervals. They're nothing more than three-quarter-inch rods or maybe one-inch rods, and they bolt together. You've got a special wrench that will tighten that bolt, but at first you've got to hold the damn thing together. It's kind of an art form because you want to put some belly in it, you want it tighter at the bottom and the top than you do at the middle, then that gives it a slight, that's where you get that barrel look. There's a skill to that. Like I say, I worked on just a few jobs. I didn't work on any—

DM:

I'm surprised to hear that they were using wood tanks in your time.

BW:

Well, it has to do with corrosion. There are certain areas, like down around Crane, the oil had a very high sulfur content, and it'd eat that steel up in ninety days. Now, we used galvanized steel when there's corrosion, but by the same token. And so wood tanks were still used for special types of operations like that. Okay, and the way a wood tank—the deck, the top is the deck, that's what it's called. And the deck was about four to six inches below where the staves all ended up there. You fill that full of some kind of insulation material and you put what's called a sundeck which is just one by twelves on top of that. That insulated the top of the tank.

DM:

I guess if you didn't, you could have some spontaneous combustion or something from the heat sun.

BW:

I never was sure about how they exactly did that. The steel tanks are what I knew about. Now the other thing was that you had to cork that thing with oakum, just like ships.

DM:

Yeah.

BW:

That's a pain in the ass. You go in there and you use that flatty ass [?] [01:03:27] on that bottom, and they come in little ropes about the size of your finger, and you've got a special kind of a chisel apparatus with a hammer, and you hammer it in that because the damn things leak.

DM:

I bet they did.

BW:

Oh, they're nasty. They're nasty. Now, I'm delving into this a lot because I worked for twenty years, built tanks for twenty years. So I got really interested and I checked a lot into the background on it. In the early days, they used cypress because you'd get a lot of cypress down in South Texas and Louisiana and whatever because it wouldn't rot. They used flat bands, they're still the rods instead of round, and they'd tighten those bands. Well the thing about it is, you never could adjust it. You'd have to go put more oakum in it. Once you get the bands and you've got a threaded bowl, if it commence to leaking or seeping, then you could tighten those bands you see. Those damn things get loose. I've seen two or three of them be laid down on one another. I mean, you know, they—and I guess that wood shrinks, but about the time of World War II thereabouts, they switched over to redwood and they commence redwood. Boy, there's some good redwood. I mean, you'd have to figure out a way to plain it down, you know, to get in that half, three quarters inch to get it to go.

DM:

Because the oil would seep into these woods.

BW:

Oh, they're nasty. Wood tanks are just nasty.

DM:

How deep? Could they seep all the way through?

BW:

Oh yeah, yeah, and they'd seep on the seams and they're nasty. I remember Dad took a job one time, we went down and we cut a wood tank down. When you dismantle them, we called it cutting them down. We'd cut down a wood tank, and I can remember, I had to throw away all my clothes, likely never got my boots clean. It just had been BS which _____ bottom settling [?][1:05:30], the thick stuff and all that settles on the bottom of the tank, you know, it's just coated in that and then you're going to have to grab the damn things. After a while, they had a good way to do it, you just hug them up and do it.

DM:

But this wood's not really reusable.

BW:

Not really.

DM:

It would burn pretty well probably.

BW:

I'll tell you an interesting story, I built a rig for the Panhandle Plains Museum in Canyon, the one that sits in the window, I built that one. So we had some eighteen-by-eighteen beams that we found out—that were stored out—these people gave them to us and we used them as the subs on that rig. We cleaned them up. I had an old boy, he scraped those, and they were nice cleaned up. If you've ever been over there, it's a forty foot window by eighty feet long, and that derrick sits in there. Yeah, well we got that thing built in about two to three months, and soon started soaking that oil out of them damn beams—oh it was great, you could smell it, it smelled just right. It wasn't enough to puddle or anything.

DM:

Like you planned it that way.

BW:

Hey, it was genius.

DM:

That's right.

BW:

But back to building the thing—go ahead.

DM:

Was it a puddle then? I mean would it drip down on anything? It was just in there.

BW:

No. It was just in there and the odor, it would come out a little on the surface, but the odor was there.

DM:

I think you planned it that way.

BW:

Absolutely, and it dated from the twenties and thirties, those old oil beams did, you know, and everything. But anyway, I built tanks from '55. I graduated in '55 in high school, and I started along about the first of May. We had about two or three weeks when we didn't have to do anything because you didn't have to take exams if you're a senior and you were passing everything. Hell, I went to work.

DM:

And you followed in the footsteps of your dad.

BW:

Yeah, Dad was working for a guy named Clyde Carter. A crew boss was called a setter in a tank crew. A tank crew is four men, and the boss is the setter because you set tanks, I mean you set them, that's where the term comes from. And then you had three hands that worked. In general, everybody in a crew could do everything there was to do. Some guys are better, and some guys were good at running guns, pneumatic wrenches. Now, by the same token, pneumatic wrenches came in right at the end of World War II. Before that, they used ratchets and there's thirty-two hundred bolts in a high-five in five hundred barrel—that tells you—

DM:

That's some exercise.

BW:

Oh no shi—man, I run a ratchet. You had what you called a walking stick which is like a three-foot extension and that's why you tie it at the bottom, you could stand up, but the air pneumatic wrenches, usually CPs, Chicago Pneumatics and Ingersoll Rand were the ones we used. They

were heavy, the Ingersoll Rand weighed about seventeen pounds and a CP usually weighed about twelve, fourteen.

DM:

Well, that would be good exercise, too.

BW:

Well, yeah, because you've got to reach up eight feet to get that top bolt on the—on up and they're on two inch centers.

DM:

Well, excuse my ignorance, but your bolting, why not welding? Is welding not strong enough to hold that kind of pressure?

BW:

You can't take it apart and move it. Portability had something to do with it and don't take as thick as steel and—

DM:

It's more economical then.

BW:

It's more economical. What happened to tank building was, along in the fifties they started welding tanks, Civils was the first big company in Odessa that put a big welding shop and they started welding tanks, started selling welded tanks instead of bolted. We set the welded tanks—essentially what you do with the—and these were usually cone-bottomed tanks. They had a sump in the bottom, say, twenty-four inches across at about eighteen inches deep, and then there was a seven and a half inches from the outside edges of the tank down to the tank to the center. It was cone shaped with that sump right in the middle. The purpose being that that BS would settle. Then you had a clean out box on the side. Later on if you wanted to, you could take that box off after the tank was empty, there'd be a service number, you could throw in suction or you could suck all that stuff out. Sump bottom—we built a lot of flat bottoms—but sump bottoms is mostly what you built.

DM:

I see.

BW:

Okay, and with a welded tank, what you do is you'd go out and you'd—we'd go out in the morning, they'd be loading tanks up on the truck, you know, whatever, and we'd go out in the

morning, we'd dig the grates and get that usually sixteen feet across, so in other words, it was eight feet to the center, dig the sump out, whatever, and get those two lined up and set. By late morning, whatever, they'd get with the tanks or maybe noon, whenever they got there, and those tanks were set on—welded tanks, they were set on a cradle on a truck, and they'd push that cradle off the end and hold the winch line and then inch it over to let it down and then they'd line them up and get everything, they wouldn't be able to walk the stairway on the—walk the stairway built out of angle iron and put them on the tanks. If you building bolted tanks, you'd do the same thing, except you do the grate, then you lay in the sections, tighten them up and so forth and then build a walking stair—

DM:

Is a sixteen foot diameter typical?

BW:

With a high five, a high five is a 500 barrel tank. It's called a high five because it's two sections, in other words, it's sixteen feet tall.

DM:

Sixteen feet?

BW:

Yeah, it's two of those five-by-eight sheets, it's two of those tall. And they're roughly sixteen feet in diameter.

DM:

Sixteen foot diameter, sixteen foot tall.

BW:

Their centers are nineteen-six, and there's three foot between them, so that's sixteen-six okay? That's what they'd be. So you set them on nineteen-six, set them three foot apart. I can tell you exactly—I can still in my mind I must have built a thousand tanks. So the welded tank, then you line them up, built the walk stair and hung it, and you could do a welded tank, a battery of welded tank, two welded tanks with the walk stair. If they got there at a reasonable time by noon, you can finish up two or three, four o'clock. Yeah, hell we'd finish by noon sometimes, they'd get there early on. Depending on how are the grate was, if it was a gulf, they'd put caliche and they'd water it and pack the son of a bitch and you had to take, but usually they just took old alkaline, and they made the pad, it was soft digging, and you made the grave, you dug it with a shovel.

DM:

Did you say you could do two tanks in one day or—?

BW:

With a welded tank?

DM:

Yeah, with the welded.

BW:

Yeah, you'd usually do two of them in five or six hours. It's not a big deal. Now, comes to the question of what you got paid. This is where the tank building thing—if you built bolted tanks, you could build bolted tanks in two good days' worth, two eight to ten hour days. We didn't count them in hours; we counted until we got it done because we contracted them. A tank would pay roughly a hundred dollars, so you made twenty-five dollars for a four man crew. Plus the setter, he got extra money for driving time, you know, you'd pay by mileage for that, plus equipment. He'd furnish the compressor and the guns and all the tools. So he probably just about doubled the wages on a regular hand.

DM:

Now twenty-five dollars apiece, that's for how much?

BW:

That's for one tank.

DM:

One tank. Per tank.

BW:

One tank. Okay, so if you built two tanks and a walking stair, you'd clear about fifty bucks, and twenty-five dollars a day in 1955 was good money. Okay, so you come to welded tanks. You had to work what we called day labor by the hour, paid \$1.66. So they were always wanting us to say—oh, and something I did not mention, you got paid driving time one hour for every forty-five miles. So if it's ninety miles, you got two hours of driving time. That paid minimum wage which in 1955 was seventy-five cents an hour, by the way. Okay, so that's the wages. So it was good money, with bolted tanks you made good money, twenty-five dollars a day. If you did a lot of specialty stuff, you could make a lot more than that. Okay, welded tanks pays \$1.66, well you're only out there six to eight hours. So we didn't go out for less than ten hours, period. If they wanted us to do this job, it didn't make a damn if—it was all set and everything and they wanted us to hang a walking stair, it was ten hours. So that's sixteen dollars plus driving time, so

you'd much rather build bolted tanks because you made more money. Okay so, in the mid-fifties these welded tanks started coming along. By the time I left to come to Texas Tech in 1969, welded tanks—it was getting to the point to where bolted tanks, you might do a week or two's work in a month, and it was a lot of welding work. In other words, you couldn't make any good money. By 1980, there are no more tank builders. People like me who remember it in the past and so forth. I know, I went to Corpus Christi, and I lived down there a couple years. I really need to get this more in context, but to give you some idea, I left Texas Tech, excuse me, I left Corpus Christi in the spring of 1974, and Dad said he had some work, and I quit a really good job—well, I just got a divorce, it's a long story. I didn't like the Gulf Coast anyway, so I left the Gulf Coast and went back to Odessa. Dad couldn't find any hands, there were no hands. Well, there were a few old drunks. Hell, everybody was an old drunk. So he had this job coming up and we built, the summer of '74 on the Rocker b, which is right north of Big Lake. It's a big ranch there. We built thirty-five thousand barrels on Rocker b, me and him. And a thousand barrel is fourteen staves around. A high five is ten staves around, a thousand barrel is fourteen staves around, and the bottom deck is heavy, it's a lot heavier. We use a hand now and again, had a weevil or two that didn't work out, but I just got a divorce, bought a brand new mustang, and that summer, he wound up paying me a hundred and a half a day. Hell, he made a hundred thousand dollars. That was the most money the man ever made in his life that summer. But there wasn't no tank builders in this outfit, this oil company had all thousand barrels that they had cut down in Louisiana and they needed to reset them. Man, it was a long way. We drove to Big Lake every day from Odessa, and I think it was like ninety-eight miles one way—it was something on that. I'd drive mornings—see how was it? No, he'd drive out there in the morning, then I'd drive back that evening when we finished work. I had a tendency to go out and check town out, and I'd be trying to sleep. He'd god damn honk the horn, hit the brakes, and just piss me off, wake me up. Oh, what I was trying to point out was, '74 when I did that, that was pretty much one of the last times that there was a lot that I was personally involved in, a lot of bolted steel work. It was pretty much the end of it. I mean, they still have a lot, I mean you see them, but roustabout crews kind of do repair type work now, and I doubt if there's been a new bolted tank built in West Texas, what, thirty years or longer. But anyway, that's essentially what we did. Now, you want me to run you through a typical day's work, the way we did it? It was a little different. Essentially what you did, usually you had to get up pretty early. You had to try to get out of town at five o' clock because you got an hour and a half drive or something, you need to be—daylight you need to be on the job and at summertime particularly. Basically what you do is most everybody would pack lunch. Sometimes we'd eat at cafes. Joe's Café in Seminole, I was never so disappointed in my life. I drove by there a few years ago, and it's been boarded up forever. It was a big place everybody stopped. But let me get back. Okay. What you do, you go down to—early on it was the ice house where they made the ice plant. You'd go down and you'd ice up your water can. We didn't have glasses, there were metal water cans. I mean old galvanized water cans. Later, of course, then you had the 7-11s with the little chunky ice. They also had twelve and a half pound blocks.

DM:

I remember, blocked and broken up.

BW:

Well, the first thing you did, you got the water, you usually had two water cans. You put a six pack in, and then you put the beer in and then you put the water. Now, when you finish the day's work, you did the reverse. You went out on the job, changed your clothes, did your day's work, finished the job, first thing you did was open the water can, got your six pack out and everybody had a beer. That's what you did. And nobody wore hard hats. The drilling crews did. Tank builders, you couldn't force somebody to have a hard hat, and we drove cars. You couldn't get a crew to ride in a pickup or anything because you had a two-wheel trailer with a compressor, scaffold boards, brackets, toolbox, so forth, you know, and you went out. We didn't use welding torches. It was very late before I saw anybody with a cutting torch, used a hammer and chisel, what we called a cold cut. A cold cut is hard work. A cold cut is like a giant wedge on a handle. If you're going to cut a tank down, a lot of times those old deck bolts are rusted so bad and everything, you take a cold cut and hold it like that and a guy takes a sledge hammer, you can take the three bolts off in a lick. You don't want to get downstream or you might get one right in the eyeball. Okay, a lot of things we did, I'll talk about the tools some more. We had ratchets because a lot of the stuff, when we were putting a tank together, you use what you call catch bolts. You know the bolt—let me start over. We're going to build a tank, we're on location. We dug the grate. The first thing you do, one of the guys starts rubbering the bottom pieces, the pie-shape pieces for the bottom. Essentially, there's a little channel there, and they're punched on two-inch centers. There's a little channel under there, and you put the bolts all in the channel there. Then you take—there's a strip of rubber that's punched on a two-inch center, and it comes in rolls, about a hundred foot rolls. You take that rubber and you punch that rubber on those bolts, and then you cut it off. Essentially you've got a piece of steel that's got all these bolts held in with rubber gaskets, and then that guy's rubber and he brings those over and lays them down on the grate, where we've dug the grate, gets those scattered out. By the time he gets a set of rubber scattered, usually it's two guys doing that, then two guys are going to start laying the bottom. Basically what you do is you put that first piece on. The first piece you double rubber, you rubber on both sides. The last piece you don't rubber. So what you do is you lay that first piece on, you take the second, beat around on it, and put nuts on all of those. Those are about, I think there's about thirty-five or something on one, and so you go around—and when you get that last piece, well then it's rubbered on both sides, and you lay just a blank on top of that. Okay, and so you lay the next one. By the time you get the first one laid, they'll have both of them rubbered. Then the gunner will crank up the gun. When you move over and start laying the second one, the gunner starts tightening the first one, then he'll tighten the second one, at which point you then line them up and get all your measurements right. You're generally within an inch or two, but it has to be exact. And you can take a—staving pin is about an eighteen-inch punch, it's the most important tool on the job. You take a staving pin, and you set up eight holes back

from where the joint is and line those two staving pins up. So you line those two bottoms up with all those pins and then measure the distance. There's three feet exactly between the two or you can go nineteen or six from the outside to the outside of the other one. So you're lined up at that point. It's tight, whatever, you dig a little trench all around the edge, about three inches deep, rubber that outside edge called a chime. While you're doing all of that, then one guy's rubbing on staves. The steel is scattered on the ground around, and they rubber just like they did the bottom. By the time you get everything lined up and the chimes all rubbered and everything, then you start standing the steel up. You stand one sheet up, and then there is a staver in the stave bunker. By the time you get about half of it stood up, that's when you use a ratchet. You can catch a bolt—you leave a bolt out about every seven or eight bolts, and that's where you put your staving pin up and line it up, and a bolt sticks through and you put a nut on it. So there's about four, five, six bolts, catch bolts, we call them. You take that ratchet and snug those down. By the time you get about halfway around, these other guys are through, they've probably been loading the deck at that point. They load it and get it ready for later on. Then it goes in in what you call driving it out. He drives out these bolts that you snugged all these catch ones, so they stick out real good. Meanwhile, the gunner starts up and he's tightening the chime behind you. Okay, you got this? Now usually we staved both tanks at the same time. We would stave one, just move and do the same process and go around. So you've got the whole thing, chime time, tanks drove out and everything, then on each one of those bolts you put a little rubber washer, a little rubber thing. Somebody goes under, and he puts all them on. The other guys come along, and you call it nutting it out. They've got a concave washer and a nut. You put that concave washer over that rubber in a nut. As soon as you get one nutted out, then you've got to get to take a wrench you got in your pocket, and you loosen all those catch bolts, and you fix them up. The idea is so the damn thing won't leak. By the time you get one nutted out, everybody nut out, get the first tank nutted out, and then the three guys start nutting out the second tank and then the gunner starts on the first one and gets it tight. And so you tighten that, then you put up brackets or just a little angle iron thing they bolt on the three bolts down from the top, it comes down, and then it bolts down about eighteen bolts below that. You know, you put those brackets—throw a two-by-twelve up on that bracket, and so you've got scaffold all the way around.

DM:

I see.

BW:

And then you work off of—I worked on two-by-twelve, eight feet high, we never did do any. Sometimes we'd double board them, if we were building grain elevators. Nowadays they've got little things on the outside of the scaffold, little cable things so you don't fall off. It never occurred to us. It was real fast. Now, everywhere that steel lapped, you couldn't get a bolt in there. So once you got it all tightened, somebody had to come along, they had to ream that out

and put a bolt and tighten it in by hand, and you had a long wrench, so the thing wouldn't leak. They wouldn't leak. It was interesting—

DM:

All that rubber.

BW:

Yeah, sometimes in modern times, a lot of guys started double rubbering the chimes. So you had two coats of that neoprene rubber in there so that would just to make it hold better. Now, I mentioned we didn't have any acetylene torches or anything. So you had to put flanges on when they hooked the tanks for pipelines, and flanges bolt on, like a four-inch flange has five-eighths holes in it. So what you do is before you stand them up, you know, before you stand it up, while they're laying on the ground, you put the flange on there and you lay it down and you take a pencil and then you mark off or you mark where the holes are. Then you come on with the staving pin and you hit that son of a bitch right in the middle where that bolt hole is, so you've got a dot there, so you can find it. Then you use what is called a mule's foot. Now a mule's foot is a staving pin that's about—you cut the staving pin off about eight inches, six to eight inches, something like, about eight inches. You grind it down to where the bottom thing is at a 45 degree angle. So essentially you have a chisel, and then you take that and a two pound hammer, and you cut a hole and that will cut a bolt hole just exactly the size you need. And it only takes about six licks if you know what you're doing. Once you get it started there, then it'll leave little—they'll be stuck on there and take a hammer and whack them on and then take two hammers, beat on it, flatten it out, put the flange on, tighten it up, and then take the chisel and cut the center out. We didn't use torches and stuff. Now, with the angle iron, we had portable angle iron cutters, and we used, you know, we cut them to size because they come out in twenty-foot lengths, and they were double punched. They were punched on too many centers, and you didn't talk measurements. Give me a twenty-two inch little iron trim closed on both ends or something like that, or twenty-two hole. Whoever's cutting the iron for you will cut twenty-two holes and trim it down close.

DM:

It sounds like quite a process—and this was all—

BW:

It was the hardest thing I ever learned to do right. Seriously, it was a lot harder than graduate school. You got _____ [1:30:54], but that's what we did. Tank builders had a reputation around the joints in town as many people—tank builders, pipe liners had pretty bad—you hear a lot about the roughnecks and all, but when the old time hands, they'd talk about those, there's some bad dudes, I knew a lot of them. So that's the kind of work I did. In 1959, I'd been doing what about four or five years then, I guess, whatever. My right knee was bothering me a little. I'm small, I'm 5'8", then I weighed about a 130, 140 pounds max. So you got to learn—by the way,

everyone carried their own iron. If you're loading the steel off the truck and you're scattering the staves around a grate, I'd carry a piece, you'd carry a piece. The way you did, you learned how to do these things, you'd stand the stave up, it's eight feet tall, five feet wide. Then you'd back up to it, put your arms in it, and just lean forward. Once you learn what to do, it'll balance right on your back, then all you got to do. We built fourteen gauge, ten gauge, a twelve gauge, ten gauge, and on the big old tanks, 10,000 or something, we would use a seven gauge. Now, the fourteen gauge, we seldom ever used it. It was too thin. Ten gauge weigh about a hundred and a half, or the twelve gauge weighed about 100 and a half. A ten gauge weighed a little over 200, and seven gauge weighed 300. I could carry them all.

DM:

You could carry a seven gauge?

BW:

Oh yeah, I saw Dad carry two of them one time on a bet. I won a bet one time after I went to work for a petro-chem plant. I told them I could carry 300 or 400 pounds or whatever, and they all bet I couldn't, and in the welding shop in there, they had built a—it's a metal device, they'd welded it up and everything, and I said well hell, I can carry that son of a bitch. So anyway, they all got their money, and I borrowed a pair of gloves from somebody because you got to—and backed up to this thing—it wasn't as big as a stave, but it was taller—and it was on a concrete flooring, and they marked off I think it was ten foot, fifteen feet, something like that, and so I got them to help me end it up, I couldn't lift some of it, and I got it on my back, boy I knew I thought I'd made a terrible mistake—I mean if anybody had put a damn string down, I couldn't have stepped over it. But anyway, I walked over and turned around and walked back, and then you set it down and what you do is you step to one side and let it fall. Well, they took fork lifts and _____ [1:33:56] 580 pounds. If your knees don't buckle, you can do it.

DM:

It's about finding the balancing point.

BW:

It's just finding the balancing point. It's like any other trade. You learn these things. So anyway, I built tanks until '59. I went to work for General Tire and Rubber Company in a petro-chem plant there in Odessa, down the south side of Odessa. Now, I never quit building tanks, we worked a swing shift. We worked seven days, seven four twelves, and seven graveyards, and it went from graveyards, to four to twelves to days is the way it went. Graveyards you got off Friday morning at eight o'clock and you didn't have to go back to work until Tuesday afternoon at four. So once a month, you had a really long weekend. The work wasn't hard. I didn't think it

was hard—some of those guys did. They hadn't been doing what I've been doing. I worked all days off building tanks.

DM:

Even when you were at Tech you said—

BW:

Well, I'm coming to that, why I went to Tech. So I went to work for General Tire in March of '59, and I built tanks the whole time. Graveyards a lot of times, I'd work, they'd pick me up in the parking lot, and I'd go on the job. I built tanks all that time. I got married in 1956, I was nineteen, my wife was seventeen. It was typical, that kind of thing. We had two children there in Odessa. So at any rate, one morning it was in August—I'll never forget this—I had an epiphany. Let me back up a moment, I had been going to Odessa Junior College during all this time also. In ten years' time, I accumulated like thirty-two hours. Going to night school, you know, stuff happens. I was going in accounting because that was the only thing—I never dreamed I'd get to go to college. It was just, you know, one of those things. And I've always read, I had books hidden all over that damn plant, it was against the law to do it, but whatever. At any rate, August of '58, I'm coming home off graveyards from the south side of Odessa going down to Grandview Avenue. I got up about Forty-Second Street, and I evidently went to sleep and ran over perfectly innocent parked pickup on the side of the road out there. And I'm sitting there, sun's coming up, it's shining I'm sitting there in this pickup, and I wasn't hurt. You know, I said to myself, I said, "Self," I said, "Anybody who would spend the rest of their life working shift work is out of their god damn mind," so I commenced getting my shit together and in January of 1969, I entered Texas Tech. I sold my house, and I'd bought some lots out at the edge of town. You know, bought a little house over here by Maxey Lake and came to Tech. Now, I was extremely uninformed as to what college was all about. I never will forget, I came down here to enroll, and I knew I wanted to study history, all right? I didn't know. The only thing I knew about history is you taught history in high school. So my presumption was that what you need to do, you need to be a teacher. I got a catalogue, and I figured out the education department, and I went over there and talked to them about it, and they explained the whole thing to me. It didn't make any sense. I'm taking all these courses, but I only get like six courses of history, and I'm going to teach history, and I'm not getting to do much history. So I thought, Well, maybe I ought to go to the history department and inquire, so I went over there, and I'll never forget, Dr. Vigness, David Vigness. Did you know Dr. Vigness?

DM:

No, I don't know him, know of him.

BW:

He was chairperson. They put me with him, and I talked to him a little bit. I told him what I wanted to do. He said, "Obviously you want to study history." I said, "Yes sir, I sure do." And he said, "Well, maybe you ought to get a history degree." He explained the program and how it worked and everything. He said, "But don't you tell those people in education I told you." So at any rate, that's how I became a history major. I moved down here in January of '69, and I left in December of '70. I did not jack around. I took eighteen hours a semester, and I took twelve in the summer. Now I had it all worked out. I had it to where I was going to graduate in August of '70, and I was three hours short. I hadn't counted the goddamn lab courses. They made me take biology and stuff like that. I'll tell you what, I did love it. It was so much easier than working in the oil patch that I just stayed till they finally gave me a PhD and kicked my ass out.

DM:

Well, you know, yeah, you had a work ethic, you knew how to work. That's the main thing.

RW:

And I didn't have any money, and I didn't have much time. I had to get it handled. Okay so now, so I went through that, and I was trying to remember, that damn tornado hit in May of '70.

DM:

May 11.

RW:

Yeah, May 11. I was working nights for a janitors' service outfit. Boy that was a great job going through school because you have till daylight to get the job done, and then I contracted, they'd paid me X amount of money to do this barber shop and they paid X amount of money to do this little store, and I had to do each one twice a week, as long as it was done by daylight.

DM:

This was your undergraduate job.

RW:

Yes, this was my undergraduate job. Actually, I started out working in motels. Boy, there's some good stories—I can tell you some good stories about Country Inn over here. You learn a lot working in a motel. So at any rate, before I left Odessa, a couple of friends of mine had gone to work for Reynolds Metals in Corpus Christi as supervisors because they had a lot of experience in plant work. So I had applied, they said they had an opening and I had applied, and they had approached me. I hadn't heard from them, and so I decided I was going to college and I heard from them, they wanted to come down and interview and I told them, "Sorry, I couldn't do it." Fast forward, I've been two years at Tech. Actually, a year. It was the fall of '70, and they had,

what do you call it, fair, when all the corporations come in and do the interviews? Job fair. What I wanted to do was go the University of—I was a history major and an anthro minor. I was so dumb that I thought anthropology was a logical extension of history into the past. I didn't understand about theory and cultural whatevers, but I learned. At any rate, I wanted to go to the University of New Mexico and be an anthro major because I wanted to go and dig pueblos up. I mean, that's what I wanted to do. Well, that wasn't working out. I couldn't get them to give me any help with the tuition. I didn't have any money by this time, pretty well spent. My wife worked for an office supply here in Lubbock. So anyway, they had this job fair, so I'm out there and I interviewed with a bunch of people about getting a job. I was wanting to go somewhere where there's a college town, so I could go into a master's program. I looked up and there was a booth that said Reynolds Metals Corporation. I walked in to this fellow, and I says, "Are y'all the bunch that are down at Corpus Christi?" He says, the personnel guy says, "Yes we are." I say, "Well what you sons of bitches need is a damn good shift foreman." And he said, "Just who the hell are you?" And I told him. That was like in September, I don't remember, something like that of '70. So he took my information and everything, and I heard from them, oh, about a month or so. They wanted me to come down to Corpus and interview. It was getting toward final exam time. Man, I was covered up. So I said, "Yeah, I'll come." So I basically took a whole shitload of books with me because I was studying. I mentioned earlier that I was like three hours short, might have been six, three or six, whatever. But anyway, I had to take that fall semester. Well now, in those days, tuition was \$50, period. The fees and everything amounted up to a hundred and a half or so, whatever. Well, I thought it was a waste of money so I took another eighteen hours, I only needed six, and I took them all in history. You know, that's where I discovered Latin American History. I was just fascinated as Dr. what's his name?

DM:
Kuethe?

BW:
Kuethe. By the way, Kuethe and I had a lot of trouble. He paid the price, and he doesn't know it. I later became important. At any rate, so I had to study for finals. So I went down and got me a first class airplane ticket. They just told me to get a plane ticket. Hell, I didn't know, so I got me a first class. Come to find out I was supposed to go coach, but I had a round trip ticket. It was great, they'll feed you liquor on that airplane if you go first class. But anyway, so I flew down to Corpus and I interviewed with them, and they wanted to go to work. It was really good money. I think they paid—that was '70—about thirteen or fourteen thousand dollars a year. I mean, it was good money, and I'd be a shif foreman for them. So at any rate, we made the deal. I came back here, finished the semester. I remember we left, and then they were going to move all my furniture and everything. They came, moved, I mean it was a real corporate deal, you know. So we went down to Odessa and had Christmas with our families down there, and by this time, I'd learned the ropes, I learned a lot about universities in that two years. One of the things I learned,

and later on in graduate school, they got really tired of me. When I would finish the semester, I would go down to the graduate school and make them pull all my records. If a course had not been turned in, I made damn sure it happened. I had some friends that got in trouble, so I wasn't leaving. I mean, I didn't want any—they could count on me being there within a week or two after the semester's over, make sure the grades are turned in. I did not want—I didn't have any slack, but at any rate, I didn't graduate, I didn't get a diploma, I didn't do shit, I left and we went to Christmas in Odessa, and I went to work the twenty-eighth day of December for Reynolds Metals Company at Gregory Portman just out of Corpus Christi. They have a big—I'll talk about the plant in a second. My wife was going back to see the family for something. She went up to Tech and got my transcript. She had to prove all kinds of stuff. The reason I went to work the twenty-eighth day of December is I had learned through the bureaucracy at Texas Tech that you need to work every angle you could, and I discovered that if you went to work in this year, that you were invested immediately for full vacation and all benefits the following year. So I went to work the twenty-eighth, and the first, okay, it stood me in good stead later. At any rate, I went to work there, and Reynolds Metals was what is called—I didn't explain. Wait a minute, I didn't explain about what we did at the rubber plant, but I double back on it. Reynolds was what was called a bare process, and it is—you precipitate the Al_2O_3 , which is called alumina from the bauxite ore. What you do is that bauxite was brought in by ship from Jamaica and Haiti. We stored it there in big stock piles, and you ground it up, and mixed it with sulfuric acid and other stuff. You put in what's called a precipitator, and that caused the alumina or the basic aluminum material to precipitate out and fall out of this, and it would be gathered out and pumped into another thing where we would dry it out and whatever, and then it was called alumina and that was like 50 percent by weight of the ore. Then you took the alumina and took it over to the refining facility which was called the San Patricio Plant next door to us, and they would melt it and they'd get a 50 percent aluminum out of the Al_2O_3 . Al_2O_3 , the alumina, looked like salt or sugar. So what we did was took the ore and made the powder, the aluminum out of it. The first job I had was, they put me in charge of the docks. We were loading and unloading the vessel. Now, you've got to understand, I've never seen a ship in my life. I'm from West Texas.

DM:

Now you're on the coast.

BW:

It was a whole other world. I learned so much about vessels and everything. One of the first lessons I learned—well, the ore ships are coming in, and they were self-unloaders. Basically, an ore ship had a false bottom in it, and it's full of ore, and there's a conveyor belt in between the bottom of where the ore is held and the bottom of the ship, and this conveyor belt running, and you open the things in the bottom of that hole and it drops that ore down the conveyor belt and it runs out of the ship and onto another belt up on the dock side onto a belt, and we ran the belt up into and made giant piles of ore. That's the short version. The long version, none of them sons of

bitches spoke English. Now the crews were Jamaican, and officers were usually European, Spanish or English or French or Norwegians. They spoke a brand of English. You were never sure exactly whether they understood you. There were a lot of interlocks on these conveyor systems, they're always plugging up from one thing, plugged up and everything, and they would shut everything down. If you saw you were going to have trouble, you used these high dollar radio and tell them they need to shut down the feed because we're fixing to have a problem. Sometimes they didn't understand, and when we shut down, we fill that god damn place full of ore down there where their conveyor belt was. So it took quite a bit of coordination. I had like a—I think my crew was twenty-two men, twenty-five men, something like that down there. And I'd been working since I was nineteen. I mean all my life I've worked people. So it was a very interesting—I was in charge of the docks, unloading vessels. My shifts, we had three shifts, four shifts, and it was union. I'd never worked around a union in my life. You carried a contract in your hip pocket, it had a little booklet, and so you didn't fuck up, and it was easy to fuck up. There I am on tape again. So at any rate, I worked down there for a couple—I enrolled at Texas A&I Kingsville. It was like, I don't know, a thirty mile drive over there in the master's program. So anyway, I worked at Reynolds, later on they moved me. I requested to move, I wanted to go the kilns in the other end, and the kilns were like 300 feet long and eighteen feet in diameter. You run that Al_2O_3 in there, and you burned off all the impurities. When it came out the other end, then we loaded it in railroad cars and things.

DM:

In what form?

BW:

It was powder. It looked like sugar or salt. It was bulk, but see, it was eighteen hundred degrees coming out of the damn kiln, so we had to cool it and everything, whatever, to get it on. Then I was in charge of the railroad cars. I can get a derailed train back on track in thirty minutes flat. Trust me, I derailed about a jillion of them, the guys that worked for me. I learned a lot of things working down there. I learned how to load a vessel. The San Patricio Plant made these pigs of aluminum that ranges from 16 to 60,000 pounds depending how big a block of aluminum. Well, the intercostal canal ran right down by us and on up to the Mississippi River. So a lot of times we would load barges with pigs to ship to refineries up at that area. So the first time I ever loaded a barge, they're about fifty, sixty feet wide and probably 200 feet long, then they got these sliding covers on them. I had never loaded a ship. So I'm in charge, and they moved the crane down there on the dock side, and they had these trucks bringing these pigs, and I started loading these things and I figured I need two layers of them. I loaded some, and I loaded some, and they'd taken this big old metal covers, and they'd roll them, they rolled on little track things, they rolled them down at the other end of the barge, and I'm loading this, I ain't paying no attention. And those guys there, they wasn't going to tell me or union, they were going to let me learn the hard way. Well, unbeknownst to me, that front end was going down and that back end was coming up.

I about sank the damn thing and didn't even know it. All of a sudden I heard this rumbling and roaring, and here comes all those covers, all those steel covers right rolling all down the thing. That's when I learned that you load something here, you go down the other end, you load something and then you load the middle.

DM:

That's funny that they turned you loose on that and didn't tell you.

BW:

Hell, who knows, you know, who knows, lord. There were a number of incidents of those kinds of things where—and I learned how to tie up a barge. There's a way you can tie those ropes. Ropes are like two inches or more, that you haul the lines [?] [1:55:21] and everything. There's a way you can tie them up to where they'll slip. The tide goes up and down and it'll give, but it won't come undone. Those guys, finally after—me and them finally got a working arrangement after we worked around one another for a while. I remember one night the wind was blowing like crazy, and the barge was in the wrong—sometimes also, we stored alumina in a big old tank down there dock side. We would ship this powdered alumina into other places by vessels, and it went up a great big old conveyor and went out and arms stuck way out over the bay, you know, so you pulled a ship under it, and you would load ships, sometimes we'd load barges. Well, we were going to load a barge one time, and it came in, and I came on a four-twelve shift, I believe. No, I was on graveyards, and they were going to start loading the next morning, and I had to move the barge up the dock to get it positioned to where the stuff. What you did, you would take a couple forklifts and you would tie a forklift on the front of the barge and one on the back and then you just tie the other one, and you just walk it up dockside. What was happening, the wind was blowing like crazy. For some reason, there was a ship unload—we had two docks; we had a dock on the east side and then over on the west side we had another dock, and you could put a ship on either side of it. The one on the east side was one on the land side. We were on the east side, the wind's blowing out of the east. There was a ship over there unloading on the other dock over there. And so I had a crew of guys, and we were moving that, and it got loose on the back end. It swung way—and it bumped that damn ship. I mean, it was 200 feet long. I'm sitting here, "Oh hell, what are we going to do now?" So I got to thinking about it, and so we undid that rope and we tied it on the other side of that barge and got the fork lift and everything, and we pulled it back a at a little time, we got it up against the dock and then I scooted it back. The general foreman got there the next morning. He walked in there, he said, "I could swear the rake on that barge is facing the other taxi." And I said, "Nah, it's just like it was." I wasn't going to—boy, I lost it, I didn't know if I was ever going to get that thing. Once again, it's a learning process. But I worked for Reynolds, I was down there—I guess I was down there for three years. I went there in December of '70, and I left there in the spring of '74.

DM:

Well, had you already—you said you started your master's at A&I. Had you already gotten your bachelor's degree?

BW:

Yeah, I got a bachelor's here at Tech.

DM:

You got it before you went down there.

BW:

Yeah, I was only here two years.

DM:

So you got it in '70?

BW:

Yeah, I got it in December of '70.

DM:

So now you were working on your master's.

BW:

And now I'm working on my master's. Well, the problem was I had an anthro minor. I went over and talked to A&I there as soon as I got there I wanted to enroll. They didn't have an anthro department. I mean, they had a couple of intro courses, but poly sci was the only thing, I had taken an extra course in poly sci, maybe two, I don't remember now, but I had taken an extra courses here at Tech, but it still wasn't enough. I was going to have to do leveling work, and I wasn't going to do no leveling work. Once again, I was on a schedule. So I talked to that dean of whatever the hell who was in charge of everything in graduate school. We're discussing the problem, and I said, "I'll tell you what." I said, "I took a con history course at Tech, could we sub that?" And they let me.

DM:

A what history course?

BW:

Constitutional. They let me sub a constitutional history course for another—

DM:

Political Science?

BW:

Political science and then made me a poly sci minor. So that's how I got in A&I. The other thing was, I scored about 1150, 1180 or something on the GRE. So I had a good high score, you know. At A&I, if you could score 500 on either the quantitative or the qualitative, they would double it and let you in to get 1000 on the GRE. I mean, they had all those kids coming in from the valley who were English second language, you know, people, and they were—I mean I was one of the few gringos going to school down there back in those days. So anyway, I wound up with a poly sci minor which, let's see, how was it? You had to do some kind of an exam, and if you aced a course or this one course, you didn't have to take the minor exam, and I managed to do that, or no, you had to make a B, that's what. And I didn't know what they were talking about. They were talking about theoretical government and stuff, and it was just gobbly goop to me. And I remember I wrote, that last paper, I've still got that paper. That guy, the prof said something on the order of, seemed to have trouble getting off the ground, and the conclusion is very strong and overall whatever, and then he gave me a B. That got me off the hook there. I took a thirty-six hour course, as opposed to a thirty hour and write a mini thesis. I didn't want to write a thesis. So I had to do this, they called it a research paper. Hell, I might as well have done a thesis, it was—you know, I discovered later. And so I was interested in Latin American history, now my Spanish is rotten, it's just terrible, but I had written the paper and everything and it had to do with the expulsion of the church during the revolution in 1910 from Mexico. I used *El Excelsior*, I think was the newspaper idea. I managed, I got my Spanish good enough I could. I researched the paper and had it all done and everything. My advisor was telling me this is not a problem, everything is cool, but he had to bring in a second guy, and this is a young prof who was making his bones. I don't what he was, and I didn't really give a shit. So I came in for the counseling session where they were going to approve this paper, and that other guy refused to approve it. He said I needed to go down to the Benson at UT or down to Mexico City and do some in depth research. I said, "I'm working forty hours a week on a swing shift. I can't afford to do this." They wouldn't give, and I lost it about mid-afternoon one day. I told them, both of them just what a couple of sorry sons of bitches they were in no uncertain terms. They thought they were going to get their ass kicked. They would have if they said anything. I was extremely upset. I just figured my university career was over. Anyway, so I went home and calmed down a couple days and went back over and talked to the chair person. I had done a—I had one of those typical professors who was getting his graduate students to do all his work for his dissertation. He was doing a statistical study of voting attitudes of people in Texas just prior to the Civil War by county and everything. I had done like four counties in East Texas for that course, and I had done all the census work and all that and done all the voting things for it, and it was a nice statistical type paper in which later on I read his dissertation to make sure, sure he plugged all of this in by county. You know, what can I say? It happens. So anyway, I said, "Okay, I've done this paper." I

said, "If I expanded it and go into East Texas and going to these these courthouses and pulling a bunch of records and expanding it." He said, "That'd work."

DM:

That'll work because it'll help my dissertation.

BW:

No, this is another prof. So anyway, that's what I did and I got out of there with the skin of my teeth. But you know, if you can read—

DM:

You got your master's there then?

BW:

Yeah, I got my master's there. And if you can read and write English, you were a star down there. That's a terrible thing to say. A lot of those kids—well one of my best friends was Emilio Zamora. Emilio, he's a hell of a story. Emilio now holds chair of Latin American history studies at UT. We're still good friends, but anyway we rode to and from, and Emilio got me involved with MAYO. Hell, I was the only gringo in Mexican American at a youth organization at A&I, Texas A&I down there. I attended all the MAYO meetings, and I got into ethnic studies pretty strongly. As an aside, Dr. Levario here at Tech—well Robert, my son, when he came into the master's program, he was working for Levario as a TA. He said, Robert was telling me, he said, "He just finished his PhD at the University of Texas." I said ask him if he knows Dr. Emilio Zamora. Hell, Emilio was his chair person. Anyway, you know when you're three days older than God things happen. Friends of yours become important people. Anyway, I got my master's at A&I, that was—

DM:

What year was that?

BW:

I was trying to remember, that was summer of '73. I was there '71 to '72. I'd been through in '72, but this little bump got in the way. My wife and I, we got pretty well crossed ways. One thing or another, people grow apart. We got a divorce in '73. She married a fellow—it was early '73 I guess when we got that divorce. She married a fellow who worked for a car agency, and they moved to Pampa. The kids went with them, and that summer of—I guess it was Spring of '74, I went down to see the kids, and I went by my folk's house in Odessa from Corpus, and that's when Dad told me he had a bunch of work coming up. I wasn't too all happy about things down at Corpus. I never did fit in well. West Texas boy, you know, and all that. So I went up to see the kids up in Pampa, and we had a little vacation and one thing or another, and I took them back

there to their mother, and I came back down, and I made a deal with Dad. I said, "All right, I'll go home, I mean I'll go back down to Corpus then I'll come back and we'll do this work." I took his pickup, I had that Mustang, I left it there at his house, and took the pickup and went back to Corpus. I never will forget—I got there on April fool's Day, on the first day of April of 1974. I was scheduled to go on graveyards with my shift and everything. I went dressed up in some pretty good clothes and went to work, and I went around on the plant that night and told all my friend, I said, "I'm out of this—" First of all, I went over that day and drew my check and went down to the bank and cashed it and got the money in my pocket. You remember me telling you about how the holiday thing, the vacation thing worked when I went to work there? Well I wasn't eligible until the end of the year, but the way their rules read, I was eligible. Also, I had about three weeks of comp time coming, and they didn't want me to—but I took it while I was gone. I called and said, "Hey, I've got to stay." I used up all that, so we went back to work. And then next morning, the old boy that was a general foreman, I did a shift report for everything I'd done that night, you know, my shift had done. There was a little window between the shift foreman's office and the general foreman's office, and I was standing there, his name was Hal, big old red-faced boy. I told him, I said, "Hal." You could see the Corpus Christi Bay sun's coming up. I mean, water's blue and little boats are out there, it's a gorgeous morning. He said, "It sure is, it's pretty." "It's so damn pretty." I said, "I believe I'll just quit this son of a bitch." "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, it's seven thirty." I said, "I've got thirty minutes left to work for this organization." Oh, he got hot and he gave me this long lecture. Finally I told him, "I'm telling you, this is my last day." After he calmed down I said, "Now, I want to ask you something." He said, "Well, you should have given us two weeks' notice." I said, "If I had of told you and gave you two weeks' notice what would you had done?" I said, "You would have called security and had me escorted out right now wouldn't you?" And he said, "Yeah, as a matter of fact I would." I said, "Well, what the hell were you mad about?" Anyway, security came down and they got me and you had stuff that needed to be checked in, equipment and whatnot. They said, "Now, you need to do a debriefing." And I went to the personnel office. So they told me and that old boy, he's told me, and then I told them I decided I was going to college, I was going down to the oilfield and work for a summer before I went I could make some pretty good money down there. Suddenly it occurred to him what time of the month it was. He said, "When do they pay y'all down there?" "Well, they paid me yesterday." I mean, he'd gone off checked the records and he found out, and he said, "Well, you've got checks." He said, "You're not entitled to that check." I said, "I don't really care whether I'm not," I said, "I've already cashed the son of a bitch and I've got it the money in my pocket." And he did get upset. He got really upset. They sent me a registry letter with all kinds of stuff later on. Anyway, once again, you need to learn the bureaucracy wherever you are. So anyway, I came up. Oh, why went there—I went to the PhD program. I just left that part out. When I went up to see the kids, I stopped, as I mentioned, with the folks in Odessa. I was going right through Lubbock. I've always adored Texas Tech, I mean really. I never thought I'd get an education. To me it was really cool. So I stopped by the history department and saw Dr. Vigness, and he remembered me.

Actually, I took two courses from him, and I kind of set him up because I sat in the second chair on the row next to the door in the classroom, in both semesters, that's where I sat. He likely freaked out the second semester when I'm there again, but he remembered me, and I did pretty well in his classes. I said, "I'm kind of at loose ends right now, and what I want to do is check on the PhD program and see exactly how that worked." Seriously, I was not—it was in the back of my mind that I might want to go in the program. I had child support and a whole bunch of other stuff I had to deal with. So he sat down, and he went through the whole thing and explained exactly what the deal was, how it worked. I said, "Well, I appreciate that." He said, "I'll tell you, Bobby." He said, "I can only pay you \$3,400 for two semesters teaching." That was the first inkling I had that he wanted me to enter the program.

DM:

Right, so he offered you a job.

RW:

Yeah, he offered me a job. I mean, this just caught me totally—and I've always been good at not showing that, I used to play a lot of poker. I thought about it about thirty seconds, I said all right—this is like April, I guess, sometime in April. I said, "Can I start this semester or this fall?" and he said, "Yeah." So anyway, we made the deal, and I entered the PhD program in the fall of '74.

DM:

He hired you to be a teaching assistant or an instructor, or—?

BW:

PTI, part-time instructor, but I had never taught. So the first semester, the first two semesters, they put me, essentially, as a TA, but as payment for PTI. Then my first semester I taught was the first summer session of '75, and I didn't have—I was writing them son of a bitches at night and giving the lecture the next morning. You been there? I was scared to death. I was afraid they'd ask me a question.

DM:

Yeah, you bet, you bet.

BW:

I had no idea. I guess we all have gone through that. So anyway, that was my beginning and then there's a lot of—Latin American history is what I was interested in.

DM:

So you worked with Kuethe?

BW:

I worked with Kuethe and with—

DM:

Did you work with Barr?

BW:

Bobby Baker. No, Barr turned out to be my chair person. I'll get around to that in a minute. I had Dr. Barr for Southern and Black and I had—I can't remember his name, he wound up in East Texas for nineteenth century. Wait, I had two Latin Americans. I had modern with Dr. Vigness, and I had colonial with Kuethe. Then I had to have a European, and that was Otto Nelson. I had him, and then I had the nineteenth century, and I had Barr. I think I did a semester, and then I did the prelims, you know, and they went in. That's when Kuethe and I got crossways. He asked me some question. I didn't really understand what he was talking about. Anyway, I stumbled around one thing or another. That next semester I dropped kicked his ass off of my committee and got—I forget now what I picked up, that must have been when I got the nineteenth century section because I knew I was going to have trouble with Kuethe. Kuethe, I don't know how he is now, but he can be really a cold fish kind of a character. I mean, I don't know how the man is now.

DM:

He's pretty much retired now I think so—

BW:

Anyway, I knew I was going to have trouble. And Ike—

DM:

Ike Connor

BW:

—yeah, Ike was my southwest. I'll skip around a couple of things. Dr. Vigness died on me. He had a damn stroke, so I had to replace him. Ike, up and quit on me, he retired. He was my chair, and I switched to Barr for chair, and Dr. Barr really taught me how to write, trust me. I think the world of him. It was a mixed bag. I went there in '74, met Diana, my wife. We were in a bullpen down there, all of us, whatever, I met her, we got married.

DM:

Down on the first floor?

BW:

Down in the basement down there—

DM:

Holden Hall?

BW:

—yeah, have you been there? They're like twenty of us in there.

DM:

Yeah, when I was there they called that the ghetto and the first floor was the penthouse.

BW:

Yeah, well we got moved up to the first floor later, but anyway, it was me and Diana were in there, Don Abbe, later, what's his name, he just retired.

DM:

Paul Carlson?

BW:

No, Paul was already gone. Oh, he was _____ [2:17:32] from South Texas. Don Walker. Don was in there, Keuthe, Mike Heinsy, Rudy Roach,[?] [2:17:43], we all started together. So you know, they've become kind of—it's kind of like being in the army.

DM:

It's a tight group. You share your condolences.

BW:

Yeah, and then Byron came in, Byron Price, but he was in the master's program when he came in. So there are a lot of people. Bill Griggs was in there. Anyway, in '77 I was finishing up, but at the time, they had all these rules about what you could work. I was teaching, you know. I know one semester they let me teach three courses, that was a big deal. You got another \$800 or something, I don't know. I was working on a grant over at the museum on ranching and German or ethnic ranching type thing in the hill country that they didn't know about, and I was part time working over there at the Southwest Collection as a field rep, but they were paying me out of different pots in the university, and they figured it out. Anyway, so '77 is when I basically went to work full time for the Collection. I pretty much finished the program and needed to write—I passed the comps which was—comps shouldn't be wished on anybody.

DM:

No, I know that.

BW:

So I went to work for the collection as a field rep.

DM:

You were full time.

BW:

Yeah.

DM:

Person at Southwest Collection.

BW:

Yeah, I went to work full time.

DM:

I didn't realize that.

BW:

Yeah, they hired me full time.

DM:

David Murrah was new.

BW:

David—what's his name had retired, the old guy, and David was director. Of course, David was in the program with us, too. Michael Hooks, Mike was in there, too. Mike had come to work, and Mike was an archivist, and I was field rep, and so I was a field rep from then until I quit in August of '79. I hated to do that, David, but hell, it wasn't paying me anything, and David couldn't get the money.

DM:

How much were they paying you?

BW:

You know, I really don't remember.

DM:

But you were there two years.

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BW:

Yeah, I was there two years. I did five, six, eight hundred hours of oral history interviews.

DM:

Yeah, your name pops up all the time.

BW:

We were doing a lot of the newspaper microfilm, and I was gathering up the newspapers, and then that was about the time Janet came to work right in about that time, and she was in charge of the microfilming. So I was bringing stuff in or whatever, and I know we were finishing up the Thurber stuff. We brought all of those, what do you call them?

DM:

Ledgers.

RW:

Ledgers and everything, and Mike and David and I went down there and got all those. I remember that. I did a lot of interviews down there with those old coal miners and different things down in Thurber. I talked to people all over the country. There wasn't anywhere much I hadn't gone. Bill Griggs had gone to work for—Bill Griggs had become director of the Panhandle Plains Museum in Canyon. He tried to hire Diana, but she was pregnant with Robert who works here now. She was pregnant with Robert and he wanted her to come up and be his publications and PR director person on a part-time basis, and she would have had to drive to Canyon all the time, and she didn't feel comfortable doing that. So then he hit me up and come to be curator of ethnology. So we moved up there in August of 1979, and I was curator of ethnology. She was publications director and PR director.

DM:

Well, that worked out pretty well, jobs for both of you right there.

BW:

Yeah, you don't often find that. Then I finished my dissertation in '82, and I think she did in '83. I know Dr. Barr, I didn't have any extensions, you know, and anyway, I called him up, and I told him I needed another extension. He said, "Bobby, we can't. We're finally at the end of our rope." I needed—I was trying to finish the last chapter. Boy, that's hard to do at night when you're working. So anyway, and I had like two weeks or something like that. Long story short, I wrote that last chapter over a weekend. I had a stack of books and a lot of secondary stuff, and it was a summation chapter, it was on Castro's Colonies is what it was. And so I did that, wrote that mother. Monday morning, I was there with five copies of that son of a bitch. I got in the car and I drove to Lubbock, turned it all in, you know, and I never will forget. This is the weirdest thing.

Of course, you have the exam over your dissertation, and so they call me, and they ask me all these weird questions and put me out in the hall, let me sweat awhile, then came back in. They bragged, they bragged on that last chapter. They said that was the finest thing.

DM:

You do well under pressure.

BW:

The only way I will work. They told me they thought it was worthy of publication and that I needed to revise it and whatever. What they didn't know was they already had the manuscript at A&M and I had the contract signed, sealed, and delivered. I didn't even tell them. You weren't supposed to do that kind of thing. The book was published by them. It won three or four prizes. Dr. Barr really did his job. The one thing I told against him is, you know, it was Henri Castro bringing those Alsaciens to Texas general republic. I had a chapter I wanted to call "The French Connection." He wouldn't let me. Well, we've got to wind this up pretty quick.

DM:

Well, let me ask you a couple things about the Southwest Collection, too. You were doing oral histories, you were picking up newspapers, but what was your range? What areas were you covering at that time?

BW:

Everything.

DM:

All across New Mexico?

BW:

We had a system. Y'all don't do this anymore, I don't believe. Somebody and I'm not sure who—we had a file, and somebody was going through everything you can imagine on people in various locations and everything. I had a coed that worked for me, and she would take this file for an area. Say we were going to Pampa. She would start making phone calls in Pampa, and she would set me up oral history interviews in the Pampa area. I didn't like to do but two a day. I've done as many as four. You've done it, you know what I'm talking about. So she was setting me up. Essentially I'd do the oral history interviews and then see if we could garner collections from the also. So she would set me up on a trip. I was gone most of the time, say, a three day trip. I'd come back with six, eight, ten interviews and pick up a load of goodies, photographs, and things. I collected I don't know how many thousand photographs that we'd copied, some we'd keep, some we'd copy and take them back. So that's essentially—and so this girl would set me up, and

she'd have set me up a month or so ahead of time. I knew where I was going all the time, and that's the way the field program worked in those days.

DM:

How far would you range? Would you go as far as Fort Worth?

BW:

Oh, Roswell's about as far as I went to the—I got a bunch of stuff out of Roswell, some really nice photographs.

DM:

Y'all used to do a lot of work in Eastern New Mexico, which was good because Eastern New Mexico was neglected by Albuquerque, Santa Fe.

BW:

Yeah, that's the hinterland for them. You know, they're more _____ [2:26:26]. I didn't do a lot in New Mexico, I did mostly Texas. I did a lot in the Permian basin because I wanted to go down there. I did a lot in the Panhandle, over around Abilene and Wichita Falls. I don't remember, I don't think I ever went out of state other than over in New Mexico. I did some Hobbs stuff and everything when dealing with Permian Basin because I did a lot of those oil interviews. We were strong into the newspaper thing. We tried to stay a couple newspapers ahead at all times. That was one of the big things I was doing was bringing them back.

DM:

I don't remember when this happened, but someone saved the Santa Rosa newspaper out in New Mexico because the whole thing burned a couple of years after the Southwest Collection preserved it.

BW:

I'm not familiar with that. I'll tell you one thing, me and Michael Hooks went down to—close to Del Rio on a ranch down there and got a bunch of the ranch papers that Holden had wrote the book on. I can't remember.

DM:

Slipped my mind, too.

BW:

Anyway, it was all the records for that ranch thing and Holden had done the two volume study on it or whatever, and the rich people family down there that had it all and everything. Hooks and I went down there and we had the typical Southwest Collection operator. I bet it hadn't

changed a bit. So we got down there, and we had a van. It was too much for the van. We needed to get a U-Haul trailer. We had to go to Del Rio, was it Del Rio or Eagle Pass? Eagle Pass I guess. Anyway had to go over there to get a U-Haul trailer. Well, we didn't have any money. I had a credit card, so we went over there, I rented the damn trailer, and it was about twenty to thirty miles, forty miles over there, drove over there and got the trailer, rode it back, loaded it up, brought it back. Stuff like that was always happening because it was—and the budget, we ran out of travel money a couple times. I know one year we ran out of travel money and we'd gotten all the Fort Worth and Denver railroad stuff, and I wound up indexing all that microfilm on subject index, you know, as a project till the budget worked back out. It was quite a bit different then. The library was not well organized at all.

DM:

The book collection at the Southwest Collection?

BW:

Yeah.

DM:

Yeah, I remember it just—well you know, we'd fill that place up over there at the math building and books running along the baseboards.

BW:

It was full, and the lady that was the librarian, she had an index file on her desk, and all the books weren't in the card catalogue. If you wanted something special, you'd have to go to her, and she'd, "Oh yeah, here, let's see, yeah, here it is," you know.

DM:

There's still a little bit of hunt and peck that goes on.

BW:

Later on after I went over, I left the Panhandle Plains. Well, we built the petroleum wing there, and I was the only one that knew the difference between roughneck and a roustabout, so I drew a short straw and I was pretty much in charge of all the theoretical layout and exhibit design and everything. As a matter of fact, I was over there yesterday and coming down here, visiting with them. They were redoing what we built then and they want me to help them. They'll call me a lot is what they'll wind up doing, but I built that wooden drilling derrick, and I got to see a guy in Odessa this afternoon about one in Odessa. He wants me to do something, I don't know, but that's neither here nor there. So anyway, we did the petroleum wing and everything. Byron left in '87. I went over there in '79, Byron had come the year before, Byron Price I'm talking about. So he became director about '84, and so he was director when we built the petroleum wing and

everything. Now in the interim, I did the Texas newspaper project, and it was a thing set up by the Library of Congress and NEH, and I had decided I needed a grant to do—I'd been working on all the newspapers in the Southwest Collection. This is when I was up at Canyon. Back in those days we had what's called a union list. Do you remember the old union list? Just acres of books, and you look—and I decided a union list of West Texas newspapers would be really useful. So I approached the NEH about a grant. They said they couldn't give it to me because there was a thing in process called the U.S. Newspaper Project. There would be one for each state to get all of the newspapers online. I said, "Well, why don't I just apply for that?" I did and I got it. I only got a half million dollars. So I surveyed all the newspapers in the state, every library, every archive, every museum, every newspaper office, and we put them on the OCLC thing in those days. I was doing it when we were doing the petroleum wing, and I wrote a couple books in the process, but we don't have to go into that. Anyway, Byron became director like '84, and then when we did the wing, he was there when we were doing the wing, the petroleum wing. And then he left in '87 to go to the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City as director. So I was kind of in the running for director, and it was a complicated situation.

DM:

You were in the running for director at Panhandle Plains?

BW:

At the Panhandle Plains, yeah. And they hired a guy named Smith, and the museum world's not very large, so you know—and I knew he was a good guy and they talked to me about it. They didn't want me to leave, they figured I'd get mad. So I had this grant to run the newspaper project. There was two phases. The first one was to catalogue everything. The second one was to survey and determine what was worthy of being preserved on microfilm. Then the second phase would be able to do the microfilm project for those things. Okay, so I'm doing that and Byron left, so they chose Smith to be the director, and he and I made a deal. He knew I could probably—and besides, I gave myself a five thousand dollar raise out of the grant because I was pissed off because they gave him the job. Once again, how you work the bureaucracy. So I made pretty good money. They made me chief curator in order to, I guess, placate me. I didn't need placating. But anyway, the understanding was was the new director would do certain things, and I would keep it organized for him. Long story short, he didn't come through. Okay, and I never will forget, I decided I was going to leave there, and I was in the Zimmerman Library at the University of New Mexico. Have you ever been there? It is a beautiful thing, that old part, anyway. So I was out there in the lobby, and what it was, New Mexico was setting up a newspaper project. I was over there advising them and helping them write their grant and so forth is what I was doing. I had applications out in various places. I had one with the Parks and Wildlife in charge of all the historic structure thing, had one at the university museum at New Mexico, and had one at the Oklahoma Historical Society, I remember. I determined I was going to leave, it was time. So anyway, I'm at the Zimmerman Library, got on a payphone, called

Byron. I said, "Byron, I forgot to tell you I put you in as a reference. You're probably going to get some phone calls. You need to tell them I'm a smart son of a bitch." He said, "Are you really serious about leaving?" I said, "Yeah, I am." He said, "Well would you consider an administrative job as opposed to a curator?" I said, "I don't know, I guess so." He said, "Well you need to come talk to me." So anyway, so that's how I wound up going to Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City.

DM:

Isn't that funny because you called him about a reference?

BW:

Yeah, I called him, you're going to hear—and so at any rate, I had this whole newspaper project thing going, I had to do something with it. I had like six months left, and I was out of money and I needed an extension. What I didn't know—they were going to give me money. I was running a 125 percent above what the rest of the country was. I bypassed all the bureaucracy and the other places, usually universities, and they had cost stuff [?] [2:36:06]. At any rate, the guy from the Library of Congress and the one from NEH, they met me in Austin. We went out to County Line out there on the lake, drank two pitchers of margaritas, and ate I don't know how much goddamn barbeque. One of them was a big jazz blues aficionado, and we went somewhere in Austin to his thing. The next day we went over, and I sold the whole thing to Don Carleton at the Barker Texas—well the Dolph Briscoe now. Don agreed to take over the project when I left. We would finish the fieldwork and then UT would do the microfilm. They should have been the place to have been doing it in the first place. I mean, they were the logical, and I'd known Don forever so—

DM:

Now how was Panhandle Plains about this being moved?

BW:

They didn't know. I was doing it, and I had like four girls working for me there. I had four offices, and they were doing all the input and everything, and I had the field rep in various parts of the state doing the work, and they would send me the material every Friday, and I would send them a check next Wednesday, I found out a way to bypass that. It was strictly cash; you didn't get into all the taxes. It was a contractual arrangement. That's the way I bypassed all the red tape. So it worked out very well. Of course, we did a bunch of it, and then the gal that was working for me made her director of it when I left, and she finished up the fieldwork portion and the input. Then she took over the Colorado job, and she is now the head of the libraries at WT. But anyway, the newspaper project, I got it organized, and I went over to the Cowboy Hall of Fame, and I never will forget, I went over to Byron to interview for the job, and we're talking. I said, "What's the job paying?" He said, "Well, right now." He said, "I'm paying the curators right at

thirty thousand a piece.” I said, “I can’t work for that.” He said, “I’ll pay you three or four thousand or whatever.” I said, “Byron, I can’t work that, I’m already making that much money.” Remember I had that boost from the grant. So anyway, we dickered around there for a while, and he said, “Well what would you work for?” I don’t remember, I named him a figured, and he jumped up and said, “Done.” He put his hand across the desk. I thought, Oh man, I could have gotten more money out of that. At any rate, the place was a mess, it really was. And he had—his goal was to organize the programming and get the exhibition programs going and everything. Once that was settled and get the financial thing organized. Once that was settled, we’d go into an expansion program. So that was in like October of ’87.

DM:

And when had Byron gotten there?

BW:

He had gone there January of ’87, the first of January of ’87.

DM:

Okay, he was he there long enough to know how much of a mess there was there?

BW:

Oh yeah, big time. So anyway, I was supposed to go to work right after the first. He came—for one thing or another, it kept getting delayed. Long story short, I didn’t go to work until the first of May of ’88. In the interim, word kind of got out that I was going—and what you call him, Smith, he was really upset. Bryan, I believe, is his name, Bryan, he was really—that I was leaving because he needed somebody to run the damn place for him. You know, we’d finished the wing and everything was operating good there. So I went there in May of ’88 as assistant director, and we did the expansion program. We went from 80 thousand square feet to 220 thousand square feet and then remodeled the existing 80 and never shut down. We kept the place running the whole time. It took what seemed like forever.

DM:

Did you have plenty of funding for that?

BW:

Well, when we started, it was typical West Texas, we didn’t have nothing, we didn’t have a nickel, and Byron—first of all, Byron and I had a perfect working relationship. Byron is not good with working with the hands or doing the operations, but he is really good with those ranch people. They just love him, and he enjoyed going to the events and howdying and shaking. I can do that, and I’m pretty good at it when I have, but it’s not—I’m an operations person. So he let me run the place, and he raised the money, and I spent it.

DM:

Yeah, okay—well, that sounds pretty good.

BW:

Kind of like being married, you know. So at any rate, we got the thing pretty well organized, got it running halfway right, and I think the first construction trailer went in there in like the first of June of about '91. So it was about two or three. Obviously we'd gotten the funding. No, we did not get the funding. We got it organized and we got the plans and everything. The original plans, seventeen million dollars, okay? Now, we spent fifty-one before it was over, but that's neither here nor there. You ask, did we have the money? The short answer is no. What happened was one of the funders, the Noble Foundation out of Ardmore Oil Company and Mr. Noble's on the board. Mr. Noble, we put the con on him, we got ahold of Wilson Hurley. Do you know who Wilson Hurley is, the artist, western landscape artist?

DM:

I know that name.

BW:

Yeah, well, Wilson became a dear friend of mine. One of the things we were going to do was build a big special events center, it's sixteen thousand square feet because there's no place like that in Oklahoma City really to hold events and things, and we determined that there needed to be a mural and things. So we got Wilson to look at it, and Wilson did five triptychs. You know what a triptych is? The three-piece painting, five triptychs to go into that Nobel Special Events Center that would depict various aspects of the western landscape, like there's a Grand Canyon, there's a Lower Falls at Yellowstone, so forth. They're like forty-two feet long and sixteen feet tall in three pieces, they're stupendous. Anyway, so we got Wilson doing that. Mr. Nobel, at 500 Gs a piece, what's that? Two and a half million dollars. Mr. Nobel agreed to pay for that, and that was the initial grant. We got the plans all together, firm out of Denver, Fentress Bradburn, the architects, and we had a national competition. So we got all that, started the fundraising and everything. And so we added that wing where the Nobel foundation, where the Sam Nobel Special Events Center is, is what it's called. It was kind of the core thing that we started with, and then we did another wing that's all for exhibition space, then we redid all the storage and we had all the shops, carpenter shop, a paint shop, you name it, and then the archive. The archive was kind of left over. I got it organized finally, and it's worked out really, really well. We went from 80 thousand to 220 thousand square feet, spent fifty-one million dollars. So we got the pledges, and we had about 99 percent, 99.9 percent. Nobody reneged on their pledges. The problem we had was, the pledges, many of them—million dollars plus pledges—were scheduled over a period over two to five years. So consequently, we're going to get money on an ongoing basis, but we had the construction costs to consider right now. So we had to essentially issue bonds. In order to issue bonds, banks had to underwrite. Now, what we did was, according to the

American Association of Museums, and they have now changed, I forget what the latest name is, they say you shouldn't capitalize your collections. Well you know, we're sitting there with 500 million dollars' worth of collection. We had a lot of art, still do—I still say we. So basically, we hawked a collection for the bonds.

DM:

Oh okay. So it was collateral.

BW:

Yeah, it was collateral. But see now, you've got, for example, the end of the trail. Have you been to the hall? At the end of the trail statue, the famous statue—we got the original. That son of a bitch is twenty feet tall and twelve feet long. It's plaster, you know, worth who knows how many million, but we valued it at four million just for the records or something. Who's going to possess that son of a bitch? I mean, what are you doing to do? It's plaster's going to fall apart on you.

DM:

It wasn't a risk.

BW:

It was not a risk, okay? But we had to have the paperwork. So we collateralized the collection, underwrote the bonds, and built the building. They paid off the last of the bonds about five years ago, about four or five years, so I was there from '88; I retired at the end of 2001. At that point, we were in the midst—I wanted to go until we finished everything. We were in the midst of our last exhibition space. We did the whole exhibition wing, and then we did the spaces kind of separately. We did kind of a temporary thing, you don't want to know. The last one was what was called the performance gallery—wild west shows, movies, television and so forth, and we had all this—we got movie star memorabilia out the ass, you know, all John Wayne's stuff and all that sort of thing. His family is an interesting group. But at any rate, we had started it when I retired at the end of 2001. So I retired from there.

DM:

You got it rolling anyhow, it was rolling good.

BW:

Everything was done, and I knew we were going to go to a corporate type. See in the beginning when I came there, we had about seventy, eighty employees, had about 125 when I left and I was in charge of all of them. I was running everything with the exception of publications. So consequently, I gradually, I knew, I told them four years ahead of time when I was going to retire, so I knew. So we gradually created departments and put people in charge of those, so that

whoever followed me as assistant director essentially had to deal with some department hands. In other words, we built a structure. It was a relatively nebulous thing when we went there. So we did the building and everything, and Byron left in '97 or '98, he went up to the Buffalo Bill up in Cody and brought a guy in, a banker there. They talked to me, and I had figured out I was not director material. I was better in operation capacity as assistant director than I was—

DM:

They were talking to you about directing?

BW:

Some of the board members talked to me about that. What we were at that stage, we needed development to go ahead and build an endowment and so forth to support the operation. The banker guy there in Oklahoma City turned out to be a really fine guy, he and I became dear friends. He was made director, and for a person that didn't know anything, he learned real quick. Then he died on me before I retired. He had a heart attack, and we were just on the verge of getting everything done, and so I left and then another fellow came in and took over. But anyway, I left in '01, and it was one of those situations to where—as I mentioned, the museum world's rather small, and I knew mostly everybody. I had to form a consultant, and people kept calling me. So for about three or four years I did the museum consultant thing and roamed around. If I'd known what consulting paid I'd have quit a long time. You go in and you tell them what needs to be—actually, I consulted on this building here. I was still working it. David got me, and he wanted me to work security and everything, I told them what they didn't want to do and they eventually have done most of it because the security sucked. There shouldn't be but one entrance to this building, but that's neither here nor there. I laid it out for them, how to do it, and the university, whatever, you're dealing once again—the loading dock, I had the loading dock figured out. I told them, "Boy, you've got to have a loading dock." The old building over—

DM:

The math building?

BW:

The old math building? Jesus, that elevator, you could get a book cart in there, and that was it. We loaded every one of those things from Thurber, a whole van load, one book cart at a time, you know take them up, it was just—and so a nice elevator and a nice loading dock is important. Those are things I remember when David had me consulted on this thing here.

DM:

Yeah, David told me this thing started out, this plan on this building started out on a napkin with an octagon drawn on it and the octagon began reduced to our rotunda down there.

BW:

You know, structures never turn out the way they start out, that's the way—I'll be lecturing, sometime in the spring, they're going to redo the petroleum wing at the Panhandle Plains. They want me to come down and I'm going to tell them funny stories about what we did when we built it originally.

DM:

When's that? Is it going to be in the spring?

BW:

I was talking to them yesterday when I came through. They want to wait until they nearly get that revision done and let me come in and do a lecture. I'll just tell stories is what I'll do.

DM:

Yeah, that sounds fun.

BW:

Mrs. Harrington, that thing, a good example. You've been there so you've seen it. You know the big glass thing? That was originally going to be the entrance, and there'd grand stairway goup to that second level, kind of like Tara in *Gone with the Wind*, you know that kind of a thing and everything. Well Mrs. Harrington who financed the thing, she liked the old art deco original entrance, and so that remained. Then we had to figure out what in the hay to put in it, and that's when I figured out that we should put—I suggested we put that drilling rig, and that's when I drew the short straw on building it. So I will be talking about things like that.

DM:

That will be fun.

BW:

It'll be a fun thing. I'm looking forward to it. Anyway, I retired, did that, and then I decided I'd start getting serious about writing. I wrote—right after I wrote *Castro's Colony*, and it was published by A&M. The then editor for A&M Press approached me about doing another book. I said, "I got a good idea about writing oil history and basic history of the oil industry." Long story short, they did the unprecedented thing, they gave me a three thousand dollar advance. This is in 1983 or '4, something along in there. When in '88 when I moved over there to Oklahoma, I asked them about it, and they said, "They didn't want to do the book because of the oil industry kind of gone flat or whatever." I said, "Well what do I do about the money?" "Well, it's yours." I mean, I had already spent it, but at any rate, it rocked on, and there was a Western History Association meeting in Oklahoma City about 2005, '6, I don't remember, '8, somewhere along in there. I was talking to, what's her name? Mary Lynne Dixon was an editor for A&M press. I

still got most of that. I got that book, about three quarters of it. Long story short, it came out to be *Oilfield Trash*, which came out. It's done very well. Then so anyway, I wound up writing, and I wrote a column for about two or three years for a newspaper. I had segued into it.

DM:

Is this how you came up with the material for *Hotter 'n Pecos*?

BW:

Well, no, *Hotter 'n Pecos*, okay. What's her name for Tech press? I'd been talking to them about the book idea. I had this idea, I forget what it was, but I sent her—

DM:

Judith Keaton?

BW:

I wrote a mystery. Yeah, Judith. I wrote a mystery, I was wanting to do fiction, I'd written five of them. I hadn't published any of them. So I sent her a manuscript, and as an afterthought, I attached about a half a dozen little short funny stories.

DM:

She picked up on that.

BW:

She called me getting off a plane in Phoenix. About a week later, said, "I want to do that book." I said, "That's great. Oh not the—" I wrote the damn thing in two weeks. I had about half the material for it and had to think up the rest of it. So anyway, I wrote *Hotter 'n Pecos* in like two to three weeks and it and *Trash* came out at the same time. So I'm running around the country doing both of them, and I used those stories when I do a talk.

DM:

A tales of the west kind of thing?

BW:

Yeah, I do the tales of the west thing, and I started out calling it west of the hundred. Okay, so anyways, that lecture thing, that's when I met Joe Specht over in Abilene who does the music. He's doing a lot of stuff on the oil field. Me and him got to be good friends. We've done several dog and pony shows. He won't follow me. He does his first because he said—and then I do the funny stories. But okay, so I started writing for a newspaper column over there in Oklahoma of humorous stories about anything. I did one about why men shouldn't shop. I mean experiences you have at Walmart. So I did that, and then an outfit over there wanted me to do a series on—

they were an oil type of newspaper type publication, and I did a series of stories for them. I dropped the newspaper thing, and it was weekly. Now, it don't sound like much, but if you've got to do one every week. And so I did about a hundred. I got about two to three hundred of them sitting on my computer. A fellow with the Permian Basin Oil and Gas magazine got in touch with me. I talked to him, I said, "Would y'all be interested in running humorous stories about the oilfield?" He said, "Well yeah, we would." We haggled around, he couldn't pay much, and so we worked out a price. I sent him half a dozen so he could see. So I've been doing that about eighteen months now. Well, about five or six months ago, I started doing long stories on oil fields. So far I've done one on rig builders and one on tank builders, one with drilling crews, one with pipe liners, one on shooters and so forth. They're more features. And so I'm writing regularly for the Permian Basin Oil and Gas magazine, and now and again somebody will call me and want me to do a story.

DM:

I'm glad you have time to write, you know, that's one thing about being out of curatorial and administrative type work.

BW:

You know, it's like anything else. The more you do, the better you get at it. I know I wrote y'all one for, Robert's the editor, and I wrote one for the West Texas that I thinks going to be in the next issue and so on, Tex Thornton, the oil well firefighter. Then I'm doing another serious one on another oil well firefighter that will be in Oklahoma Historical Society's publication. So I do those, but I got enamored of writing fiction, and I've got six of them at various stages, a couple of them finished. They run about 200 pages, whatever. It's a lot easier to write fiction. The hardest thing to learn was learning how to do talking.

DM:

Storytelling?

BW:

No.

DM:

Of the dialogue?

BW:

The dialogue, how to do dialogue. The dialogue, how to do the dialogue, because we're not trained to do a dialogue in the history profession. It took a little practice, and I finally got good at it, and I've written two or three mystery stories. The first one starts right here at the Southwest Collection. The problem with doing fiction is it's harder to find an agent than it is to find a

publisher. You can't publish without an agent, and that's the dilemma I've found, or maybe not. But I like to write, so I'll write them. It doesn't make any difference.

DM:

Have you ever thought of self-publishing some of these things?

BW:

I don't want to do that. One of the problems that you get into with that is you've got to handle everything. I got mad at A&M because I didn't think they were publicizing *Trash* well enough, and that's when I talked to every club in the state of Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas selling that book. But you have to set those things up, and you have to organize the whole thing, and it takes a great deal of time and effort, and then you've got to get tax things for the various states so you're legal. You don't have to, but if you get caught it's going to create a problem. A&M was really pleased with me because I sold more books than anybody they'd had in a long time, just somebody coming in with a book. So that worked out well, but I like to write and I enjoy it and I sit down and—

DM:

Well you're always going to stay busy, aren't you?

BW:

Well yeah, I'll stay busy. Hell yeah. The reason I enjoy writing those stories—you know, for the magazine I wrote a story on—they approached me about this. You got to stay three months ahead on them, three stories ahead, the way it works. So right now my December stories are there, but the September story is just coming out. You see what I'm saying? Because they've got to have that material to lay out the magazine. Back in April, I was coming to the West Texas meeting up in Amarillo, and I got a phone call from that editor and said that June was going to be the hundredth anniversary of Red Adair's birth and wanted to know if I knew anybody who could write. I said, "Hell, I can write." I said, "Hell, I can write. I've got a file on it." So I wrote the story and it ran and it got picked up by National AP, and so they were really tickled. Everybody forgot it was—nobody thought about it being his 100th anniversary of his birth. So it was one of those things that worked out real well. And it was fun because when you talk about a colorful character like that. That gave me the idea for doing Tex. So I told Rob that if they wanted it, I'd write it. So I wrote that story about Tex Thornton. As it turned out, it turned out more complicated than I thought.

DM:

Oh really?

BW:

He was not a sterling character. I discovered a lot of information about him that wasn't, but anyway, it's a good story, and it's a fun story.

DM:

Okay, I'll watch for it.

BW:

Then I'm writing the one now on Myron Kinley, and Myron Kinley was kind of contemporary with Tex Thorton except Myron was a more—he ran away from home and went to the oil patch at thirteen years, and his dad was a shooter, nitroglycerin shooter, so he learned how to handle explosives, but he was more scientific, and he's considered the father of modern oil well firefighting. He developed a lot of techniques and inventions and so forth. And in 1949, he hired Red Adair and taught him everything he knew. I've got a great picture of 1950, the year after Adair went to work for him and him and Myron are loading a fifty-five gallon drum with nitro to shoot the fire. It's really cool. We've talked about long enough, I've got to get ahold of Rob, we've got to have lunch and I've got to go to Odessa. I've got to be in Odessa at three.

DM:

Oh okay, well we'll shut it off, but I might have some more questions sometime.

BW:

Listen, if you want to look at this and figure out some segmented areas that we'd like to go into detail, I'd be happy to set up.

DM:

That sounds good. I don't know how often you pass through. Another thing, when you do this thing in spring, I'd like to come up and get a video tape on that if you could.

BW:

Okay, I'll holler at you.

DM:

Well, they may video tape it there.

BW:

They don't know right now because they don't know when the wing's going to be complete.

DM:

Yeah, just let me know through Robert or something.

BW:

I'll do it.

DM:

Okay.

BW:

Okay David.

End of Recording



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